MARIE OF ARCADY

F. HEWES LANCASTER

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MARIE OF ARCADY

BY

F. HEWES LANCASTER

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY

ROSE O'NEILL

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CHAPTER ONE

THE FLOWER OF FLAME

Bayou Bienvieu was very old; older than its pines and willows; older than its bogs and marshes; old but not aged. Into the eyes of the girl who knelt down beside it the Bayou smiled a warm, brown welcome even as it had smiled into the eyes of the old exile who many, many years ago had stooped to drink of its sweet waters.

Bayou Bienvieu smiled, but, eh bien! the girl did not smile. Nor did she bathe her parched face and panting lips. Anxiously, hurriedly she washed her hands again and again until the rattling cry of a kingfisher, startlingly loud in that noonday stillness, sent her scurry-

ing up the bayou bank and out upon the hot white road.

The Bayou sighed for her going. Where the old man had stooped to drink there he had stayed, and the basin of the Bayou had become a 'Cajan settlement. A land of small farms and large loves, and of loyalty to love. French peasant had been that old man, and French peasants the band he led — one and all exiled from Arcadia by act of England.

Bayou Bienvieu knew about that, — had indeed been told the story over and over during the hundred and fifty-five pleasant years that had passed since that day. But this girl who had no smile to give to its smiling, who had no thirst for its clear waters, was she, too, an exile? And if so, by act of whom? The Bayou went wistfully, wondering through all its shadowy pools and shining spaces.

And was it that the girl also went wistfully? But no, it would seem that she went in fear, she hurried so — not as one in haste, but as one who fled — hurried, hurried along the white track that ran gleaming through wide levels of glittering green. The road was empty, for no 'Cajan would have ridden a horse or driven a team through that terrible heat, empty of all things save the hurrying girl. She, so slim and young, did not seem to feel the heat. The hot white sand burnt her bare feet; the hot red sun beat upon her bent head. The sweat ran down from her thickly curling hair through the dust upon her cheeks to the dryness of her lips, and still she hurried. The flats lay down behind her, the hills began to rise, and the pines drew nearer, nearer, until one big fellow flung his shadow boldly across the road before the hurrying girl. It was the short, black shadow of noon,—an

ugly shadow, squat and bent like an old man bearing a bundle. The girl started back from it as from a thing of terror, sprang into a little, well-worn path that ran up a hill, and fled upward until she was halted by an imperious:

"Où?"

The girl stopped, spent, panting, and her gaze, hot with the defiance of helplessness, sought the ugly shadow before her.

This figure was not one to cast ugly shadows. It was a boy, very little, very lean, with hair as black as a bad dream, and eyes ablaze with brightness. The boy was L'Un, the older of those Paul twins who were known on the Bayou as L'Un et L'Autre. He returned the girl's quivering glance with one of keen questioning and repeated:

"Où?"

Then as her panting lips made no reply, L'Un thought of another thing.

Since he had begun to come to school he had learned that all people — notably, the teacher — could not understand French. No matter. He, L'Un, could speak his American, which Hérbert, his big brother, had taught him. Proudly the little chap squared himself to the undertaking, thrusting his fingers into his trousers and translating grandly:

"Voilà! Where 't is you go? Ha?"

The girl did not seem to hear. Her breath broke badly. Her glance went past him, seeking as in fear. But the teacher heard and came quickly to the door to see what the school's imp of mischief was up to now.

"L'Un, I thought you went out to get that pencil. What are you doing there?"

L'Un turned indignantly.

"Me? I don't do not'ing. I talk her French. I talk her English aussi. Mais all time she stand dere look, look —

Godamit, I t'ink, me, she got no head."

"L'Un!" And the teacher also was out in the well-worn path.

"Didn't I tell you that you must not say 'Godamit'? It is wicked. Go to your seat."

L'Un obeyed the pointing hand, and the hand, returning, came to rest on the girl's arm.

"Come in, child. You must not stand in this hot sun. We are crowded, but I can find a seat for you near the larger girls."

It was the voice of authority and the girl obeyed it, trembling under the firm hold that guided her; shrinking from the scores of black eyes that blazed their excited wonder upon her dusty face and feet and clean, clean hands.

The corner was reached, the girl was seated, then the teacher brought book and pencil and the perfunctory question:

"What is your name?"

The girl, whose glance was going round the schoolroom as if it still sought what it feared to find, did not seem to hear. The teacher tried again, doing the best she could in French:

"Quel nom as tu?"

The girl's wild, seeking eyes sank as she drew into a corner, with her clean hands tightly clasped, and the teacher's question came again:

"Quel nom as tu?"

A quick breath quivered; the school leaned to listen; a silence fell. Then again came the question, patient, pitiless:

"Quel nom as tu?"

An impish, triumphant whisper came in answer:

"Ha, ain't I say, me, she got no head?" the whisper came from L'Un's seat. "No head" was the 'Cajan phrase for fool; and it made the teacher re-

member that every 'Cajan girl has a "Marie" somewhere in her name. She put her hand on the girl's shoulder and said firmly in French:

"You must tell me your last name, Marie."

And this time the answer was not a whisper but a wail — a wail, as it would seem, of terror, yet piteous:

"M' cou! M' cou!"

"Your neck?" said the teacher. Then she brightened. "Oh, you mean your name is Micou!" It was the best her English ears could do and she wrote it down briskly. "Don't cry, child. No one is going to hurt you," she said in English and went away, impatient, to catch up with her waiting classes.

The little girl, too tired to run any more, even if she had dared to leave her corner, sobbed helplessly. There had been the hideous shadow, the terrible question, and now there would be —

Voilà! Already there was a girl of about her own age sliding down the bench toward her, — a girl with warm, bright hair and joyous eyes, who bent down to her with soothing in her touch. It was Félicie Santerre.

"Don't cry, Marie," she whispered, and her 'Cajan tongue made of the words a comforting caress. "For why you cry? You scared for teacher to write your name? Voilà, das ain't not'ing. 'T is just how teacher do. Everybody's name she write in book, mais oui, tout le monde. She ain't going do you not'ing, no. Don't cry, cherie! For why you cry? You t'irsty? — oui? I will ask teacher let me give you water. Don't you cry, cherie." She went and came again quickly with a dripping cup.

"You can drink it all — dere 's plenty."

As Marie's dry lips closed eagerly

upon the cool tin brim the hand on her shoulder steadied her. She returned the cup with a whisper:

"T'ank you."

"You welcome," Félicie said kindly, and sat down close beside her.

The teacher had called a class, and a tall boy had started up the aisle. He seemed to stumble as he passed before the two girls, and his book fell at their feet. He blundered downward to recover it and Marie looked up, startled by his abruptness, and looked straight into his face, small and skinny; into his eyes, round and bright.

"Doggone!" said the boy, "you do just like one fool."

Marie drew nearer to Félicie, but Félicie had for this fright a comforting whisper also.

"'T is Valère," she said gently, — "Valère Dupré. He ain't going do you not'ing, no!"

She spoke very gently. A year ago Valère had offered Félicie his hand in marriage, and Félicie had cried and said she was sorry. It was such a shabby hand, — long-nailed with curved fingers, — not the right kind of hand to be on a boy's arm. But Félicie had never told anybody about that. She began now to make Marie look elsewhere.

"Dose little chaps yonder," she pointed her speller, "one wit' black hair, one wit' yellow? 'T is L'Un et L'Autre, — dey 's twin. Das big boy dere das have his head so high is brot'er wit' dem. Hérbert. He 's proud, yes. Proud, like M. Reneau."

A breath escaped Marie.

"Reneau?" she repeated.

"Oui," said Félicie. "M. Victor Reneau. He is rich man, and proud, ma foi! — Mais, Hérbert, he ain't rich, no! He ain't got not'ing; not even

horse. He 's engaged to my sister Josephine, yonder." The speller pointed again. "Dey 's going make marry when he got house ready."

Félicie went on cheerfully with her comforting schoolroom gossip, but there was one boy toward whom her speller never pointed, of whom no story was told, — a big, broad-shouldered fellow, who sat near the top of the school, and who carried his head with a fine, fearless fling that went well with his good-humored glance and kindly smiling lips. Spent and famished, and full of fear, Marie watched him with a soothing sense of safety; watched him swing out of his seat; watched him walk.

The big fellow was Aluin Moise, Félicie's best boy friend. Since he was a little chap Aluin had always stood by Félicie, and as soon as school was out he came to stand by her in her championship for the newcomer, quietly put-

ting aside the curious crowd with a push of his strong arms.

"You going take Marie home wit' you?" he asked kindly. Aluin was always kind, like his papa, M. Moise, who was the best loved man on the Bayou.

"Mais oui!" said Félicie.

There seemed to be nothing else to do. Félicie did not want to do anything else. She repeated, "Mais oui," and asked courteously, "You going go home wit' me, ha, Marie?"

Marie nodded shyly, her lashes upon her cheeks. The three stood together in the hot afternoon sunshine, — the big Aluin, the laughing Félicie, the way-worn Marie. The teacher looked at the group as she passed it. From some things she had noticed the teacher had begun to believe that Félicie would marry Aluin in the days to come. His strength and her gladness would be

beautifully mated, so the teacher thought, and she knew that on Bienvieu matches were made in the schoolroom rather than in heaven. Also, Aluin's mother, the live little Madame with whom the teacher boarded, had been often heard to say in one of those eager repetitions that make up such a pretty part of the Bayou talk:

"I don't believe, me, dere can be girl more fine dan Félicie. Ma foi, she can laugh glad, yes."

Something in the way Aluin was looking at the stranger made the teacher look also.

"She is a beautiful child," she said in wonder. And Marie was beautiful, with the large-eyed beauty of her kind, with the firelit beauty that a dash of Italian blood gives to 'Cajan comeliness, — "a face like a flower," the teacher thought, "but like a flower with a flame behind it."

The sun stooped lower, the shadows fell. Aluin and Félicie with Marie between them turned into the path that led to the Santerre farm. The teacher, with the two little Moise girls, went on toward her boarding place and found Madame Moise waiting for her, all life and eagerness.

"Ma foi," cried the gay little Madame in greeting, "I hear, me, you have new scholar to-day."

"Yes," said the teacher. She had long ago ceased trying to understand how news traveled on the Bayou. It seemed to have wings and a will of its own and the teacher supposed that it had.

"Ma foi," commented Madame. "And she say her name is Marie Micou? I wish to know, me, where 't is she come from. She come up big road, maybe?"

"Yes," said the teacher again, and began to eat her bean soup.

"Mais oui! And I hear, me, she is all dirty but her hands, and dey is clean, yes."

"I did n't notice," said the teacher.

Madame laughed out in merry delight.

"You ain't see das, no? Dere ain't anybody pass since she come das ain't say, 'Das Marie Micou, she keep her hands clean, yes.' Clean like moon in winter. Mais oui, dey all say das. Ha, here my old man is!"

It was, indeed, M. Moise who appeared just then at the kitchen door, but a M. Moise very hot and very black.

"Excusez-moi, s'il vous plaît," he said courteously to the teacher, "I been down to kiln sacking coal."

"You must have found it warm work this afternoon," Miss May said cordially. She liked the big, slow-spoken Monsieur; liked him heartily.

"Yes, ma'm. Hot sho." M. Moise turned to his wife:

"Où Aluin, Bébé?"

"He ain't come yet," Madame cried hastily. She was in a fever to tell the news. "Voilà, cher! Miss May have new scholar to-day," she began busily. Madame Moise had a very busy way of talking, her hands, eyes, shoulders, and even her feet sometimes, taking part in her speech. "Mais oui. A new scholar! Nobody don't know her name. Don't know where 't is she come; don't know not'ing! And when teacher ask her somet'ing she cry! Mais oui, cry like she is scare'. And she is all dirty, cher. All dirty, yes, but her hands. And dey 's clean, — clean like she 's just been wash'."

"Sho, sho," Monsieur said kindly. M. Moise always said "sho, sho," and then stopped to think about it before he said farther. Madame ran on eagerly:

"Mais voilà, cher. She say her name

is Marie. Marie Micou. Micou! I wish to know, me, what name das is. I never hear name like das on Bayou. Ain't it curious?"

"Sho," said Monsieur. "Curious, sho!" He stopped to think a bit and then put a deliberate question:

"And where she is now, Bébé? Das Marie Micou?"

"She go home wit' Félicie Santerre. Seem like Félicie is only somebody in school don't make her scared."

Monsieur shook his big head slowly.

"I don't reckon, me, she can stay *dere*," he said.

"You don't reckon," Madame uttered. "Ma foi! I reckon, me, if she wish to stay she will stay, yes! Das old Sam Santerre, he 's scholard. He don't care, no! If he ain't got but one 'tater and man come long, ask him for piece, voilà! He 's going break das tater in two, give him piece! And he ain't ever

going stop t'ink where he 's going get some more piece, no!"

M. Moise began to nod his head preparatory to saying "sho," but before he could say it his little Madame had plunged headlong into the new opening.

"And where she will *sleep* — Me, I don't know! Das house, it is so little, and dere 's so many children in dere already. Dose little chaps, dey sleep under kitchen table now. Ma foi, I *don't* know where das Marie Micou can sleep."

Into the tragic pause M. Moise said, "Sho, sho," and considered it. But it was not to the stringencies of Santerre's house-room that Monsieur bent his thinking. With the mind of a bread-winner he was considering the scholar's resources.

"I don't know, me," he summed up slowly. "I don't know if Sam can do like das."

Madame rushed into reply.

"Oh, cher!" she appealed, "you reckon Sam Santerre 's ever going stop t'ink if he can do, or if he can't do? Mais non! He 's just going go do. 'T is his Madame das will have to stop t'ink. Ma foi, I reckon she 's going have to t'ink heap before she find place for das Marie to sleep!"

The big Monsieur had ever a word of excuse for a name under blame.

"Sam 's scholard," he said gently. "Scholard, sho!"

This excuse of scholarship that was so often urged in defence of M. Santerre's dreamy thriftlessness had been assigned to the old man when it was learned years ago that he could sign the teacher's report. A thing that none of the other Monsieurs on Bienvieu could do. Scholarship, of course, could not feed hungry mouths, but M. Moise thought he had settled the question of

feeding Marie Micou when he got up weightily and said:

"I reckon, Bébé, better tell Madame Sam we going fetch her load of 'taters for help out wit' Marie. For help out, sho."

And Marie Micou did indeed go to live in the Santerre household; to brighten a bit in the presence of Félicie's gladness, and, eh bien, to attend school, say her lessons, and begin to learn English words, just as the other children did.

But for all that L'Un, the black-haired twin, stuck manfully to his first opinion, — that the new girl had no head. He stoutly defended his position, asking:

"Godamit! Don't she wash her hands all time?"

L'Un's own hands were a pair of black little paws that made the teacher shudder.

CHAPTER TWO

A DIME AND DELIGHT

"WHERE had Marie Micou come from?" But yes, that may have been a burning question; but there was another question of even more intense interest that held the attention and wagged the tongues of all the Mesdames on Bayou Bienvieu. It was:

"I wish to know what Madame Sam is going do about das, maybe?"

Madame Sam soon showed them what she was going to do touching this, her Monsieur's latest piece of unthinking generosity. She set about thriftily to make the best of it. Twenty-five years of life as the wife of a scholar had taught her that it was cheaper to work than to worry. She put her philosophy very plainly:

"When you work, you can laugh; but when you worry, you can't laugh, no. And when woman can laugh, den she is strong!"

So with a laugh, Madame Sam set herself to search for the jewel in the snout of this perplexity. She tried Marie at the cooking kettle; then she tried her at the washtub; then, undaunted by disasters, she said gaily:

"Eh, bien, ma belle enfant. I wish to know, me, what 't is you can do, maybe?"

Marie's reply was an unhappy murmur:

"I can sew," she said.

"Ha?" Madame uttered kindly. "And how 't is you can sew, maybe?"

"Like dis," Marie told her. She picked up a piece of cloth from the floor and began to pull it to pieces, thread by thread. Madame, looking on, felt L'Un's declaration being forced into her

mind. If this was sewing, surely it was the sewing of the silly. But Madame Sam, being strong, and patient, and kind, sat silently watching the bent head and busy, clean fingers, and while she watched, her eyes began to snap with comprehension. Marie was not pulling out all the threads, only a few of them one way, then a few of them another way. Madame had seen that done before. It took clean, supple fingers to do it well. She got up quietly and brought a needle and thread and laid them on Marie's knee. If it should be that this strange girl could sew like that! With quickening heart-beats she watched, while Marie deftly pulled the threads this way, and that way, and then — ah, Heaven! — with the threaded needle began to put back other threads in the place of those she had pulled out. But she did not put them back as they had been before. Madame Sam

clenched her own tough hands together in an ecstasy of joy and excitement. Before her eyes rose a vision dear to her dreams,—a vision of something black and shiny, standing in all its bright beauty before her kitchen fireplace. A stove! Madame Sam, with her eyes upon Marie's fingers tying dainty knots and putting in skillful stitches, saw the stove grow and grow, until almost it became the verity she had longed for through all her housewife days.

It was Saturday afternoon. Josephine and Félicie were in the kitchen ironing their white dresses against Hérbert's coming on the morrow. The scholar was out in the field planting potatoes, when he should have been breaking ground for turnips. The boys had gone fishing. Marie stitched away until the little square of cloth had become a web of fairy-like daintiness. When at length she took out the needle for the

last time and looked up, Madame Sam was standing over her with glistening eyes and trembling smile.

"You will let me have das sewing if you please, Marie?" she asked, and her hands shook a bit as she took the scrap and folded it into paper. "Arret'," she said, leaving off a syllable as 'Cajan women do sometimes when they are excited. "Arret'. Me, I go on Black Bayou. If my old man come to house before I get home, say to him I have gone abroad to see somebody."

The Black Bayou settlement was six miles away, and it was rather late in the afternoon to set forth upon so long a walk, but Madame Sam lost no time about the doing of it. With the carefully folded bit of sewing in one hand and her shoes in the other, Madame swung away to make the call. Her skirts were tucked up to the knee on one

side, to be out of the way of her stride; the side flaps of her sunbonnet were thrown up over the crown of it and tied there with the bonnet strings, that she might get all the air she needed, and yet have eyes and brain-base shielded from the August sun. So Madame swung along. She was a tall woman and got over the ground with the lope of a long-legged horse. Up hill, down hill, over sharp pebbles or hot sand, through water, through mud; on she went — the light, springing steps of the bare-footed, with the swift, swinging stride of the strong — making four miles an hour, and not drawing an extra breath. Once she stopped, before crossing a sun-beaten flat, to pull some green leaves and put them in a cool layer between the top of her head and the crown of her black bonnet. Once she dived into a mass of undergrowth to gather an herb good for burns. But never for an instant did she lose sight

of the project she had in mind, and always the stove went before her like a beckoning beauty.

"Ah, Heaven!" she said at intervals, "maybe you t'ink I ain't going keep das stove *nice*, no!"

There were two widowed sisters living on Black Bayou, who did such sewing as Marie had done on that bit of cloth, and they made much money by doing it. They received orders from New Orleans for more work than they could do, and though they were killing themselves at their needle, they were counted the richest people on the Black.

"And I know, me, dey going be glad to give Marie some of das work to do. Dey can't do it all — T'ree dollar for handkerchief — and 't is only week dey take to do das. Me, I can fetch work every Saturday. T'ree dollar first week, t'ree dollar next week — Ah, heaven! 'T is soon I 'm going have stove now.

And maybe you t'ink I ain't going keep das stove clean, me! I 'll keep it clean as Marie's fingers. Voilà!"

Voilà! Madame Sam had reached the edge of the Black Bayou settlement and it was time for her to put on style. She turned aside to a little stream that ran there and washed her face and her feet, and dried them on her underskirt. Then she put on her shoes, shook down her skirts, smoothed her hair, threw away the green leaves, and let the flaps of her bonnet flutter gaily. With the leisurely air of elegance and the dragging step of the shod, she entered the Black Bayou center of trade.

The sisters were at home. Eh, bien, they were always at home and always stitching. Madame Sam, vigorous with the vigor of the open air, noted them as they rose to greet her — one of them with black circles under her eyes, the other with red spots in her cheeks.

"Ma foi," reflected Madame Sam, "I would not wish any of my girls to look like das, no! not for kitchen stove!" Aloud she made the expected inquiry concerning their health.

They were not well, Madame Celestine told her. Mary have mercy upon them! they were not well. They made money, yes. But all their money went to pay doctor's bill. 'Tisie had a pain in her side, and she, all the time she had the headache.

"Maybe 't is if you don't sew so much," Madame Sam suggested practically.

"Mais oui," Madame Celestine cried, "'T is like das de doctor say. Mais —" and both sisters spread their hands wide, "mais, we must fill de order. All time we must fill de order, or where will we get money for pay de doctor? Ha?"

It was an unanswerable argument.

Madame Sam did not attempt to refute it. She said:

"I have young girl come stay wit' me. She do stitch like das, and I t'ink maybe 't is you can give her some work you don't want."

Madame 'Tisie raised her head sharply. It was not fair for a caller to begin talking about something else before she, 'Tisie, had had an opportunity to tell about the pain in her side.

"I wish to know, me," she said ungraciously, "how she do stitch."

But Madame Celestine had had her say and was keen for news.

"Das young girl? 'T is das Marie Micou we been hear 'bout, ha? Dey say she wash her hands so much!"

"Oh, yes," said Madame Sam. "She keep her hands clean. All time her hands is clean like yours is. She keep dem clean for sew." Madame Sam might want a kitchen stove and want it badly,

but not even the richest woman on the Black should criticise the little girl who had come to her for shielding. Having silenced the sisters, Madame added complacently:

"But yes, Marie have nice hands. Aussi, she do nice work. Voilà!"

And as Madame Sam spread in her hard palm the scrap of sewing, it was as though some wonderful thing had happened. The sisters let fall their stitching. Madame Celestine forgot her headache, Madame 'Tisie the pain in her side; and in their wide-open faces, Madame Sam saw shining her kitchen stove!

"I t'ink, me, she do right nice work," she said. "I t'ink if I show das work to some stranger, maybe, she will say: 'Mais oui! 'T is nice work. I wish das your Marie make mouchoir for me.' I t'ink, me, maybe she say aussi: 'Voilà! I will pay you' little girl t'ree dollar

for make me mouchoir so fine like das' — "

Madame Celestine shut her face in a hurry and interrupted:

"But no!" Then having uttered the ejaculation with emphasis, she waited and left it for Madame 'Tisie to say in clever mimicry to Madame Sam what their patrons not infrequently said to them.

"It is impossible for us to pay so much," Madame 'Tisie said.

"Eh bien," Madame Sam remarked. "Dose shadows yonder, dey get long some. — I reckon, me, I better be going." She arose, all gracious bearing. "I don't reckon you could pay Marie 'nough for make it wort' while for me to fetch work so far. 'T is six mile I come; 't is six mile I go."

"How much you going want for fetch work?" asked Madame 'Tisie. This was a source of revenue Madame

Sam had not foreseen. She was startled and was almost saying that she would charge nothing for her journeying, but checked the speech with a shrug of her shoulder:

"Oh, I don't know, me. Ten cents, maybe."

"Dix sous," repeated the sisters. They were the richest people on the Black, but then, it took all their money to pay the doctor. "Dix sous!" and they sighed: "Eh bien!"

Madame Sam began to fold the bit of fairy-work into its papers. The sisters watched her sadly. How strong she looked, towering above them as they sat sewing! Strong as sunshine. They would have to pay the ten cents. Madame 'Tisie looked at Madame Celestine. Madame Celestine arose wearily and said:

"Ten cents! Eh bien! Now we have little mouchoir here — 't will have to be

nice work! I don't know if your Marie can make it like das woman wish — Das woman, she find de fault so much. Oh, mon Dieu, she find de fault! If your Marie spoil das cloth, she will have to pay. If she make it, 't is two dollar and fifty cents she will get for make — "

Madame 'Tisie put in precisely:

" Mais, if Marie don't make mouchoir, if she send cloth back, we don't pay you not'ing for fetch it. No! "

Madame Sam with a grand shrug took the package Madame Celestine was putting into her hand:

" Bien," she said. " I will show it to Marie. If she t'ink it wort' while to make it for two dollar and fifty cent — " Madame shrugged again. Then she gave the wealthy women gracious adieus, and put out for home. At the edge of the settlement she took off her shoes and began to live her glad, free life again. Ten cents! What could she not do with

this extra ten cents a week? A spoon one week, a fork the next week, a pan —

"But no, 't is *pan* I will get first week. First week, petit bassinet! — comme-ça," said Madame Sam, measuring off the imaginary circumference with her large hands and talking eagerly to herself as she strode along. "Tudieu, I don't know, me, how long 't is I been wish to have little pan like das. And now, voilà, I have him! I know, me, Marie can make mouchoir."

How fine it was! To have wanted a nice kitchen so long — so very long — and to see it now shaping itself before her on the sunbeams that fell long and slant between the pines.

Madame Sam swung in from her twelve-mile tramp with a cheer to her old man:

"Voilà, cher. You ain't had some supper. No?"

M. Santerre was sitting on the steps. His hair was white, and thin at the temples, but his eyes were kind, lighted always with sombre fires of feeling. M. Santerre had not been a success from a financial point of view, yet failure had not made him bitter; had, indeed, made him tender towards every sort of suffering.

"No," he said gently to his Madame, "we ain't had some supper. De boys catch some fish but de girls did n't know if you wish dem to be cooked for to-night or kept for to-morrow."

Madame Sam laughed gaily:

"Oh, dose girls! We cook some for now, — keep some for to-morrow. Me, — I go cook you some supper tout-de-suite."

The scholar detained her gently:

"Dey 's little, cherie. Dose fish."

But Madame retorted:

"Voilà, little fish make big soup," and

M. Santerre had to tell her bad news full upon her buoyancy:

"Cherie, while de boys don't watch what he do, das Valère Dupré come long. He cut all de head off dose fish, and he t'row dose head back in Bayou."

"Cut off heads and t'row dem back in Bayou!" But Madame rallied gallantly in an instant:

"He ain't got no head, das Valère. Pauvre garçon. De boys must watch out. Eh bien, cher, if we ain't got not'ing but tails for make soup, den I reckon, me, you going have to eat tail soup for your supper, ha?" And laughing not at her own lame joke but at the light shed on it by her old man's grateful eyes, Madame hung her bonnet on the nail, put her shoes into the corner where they belonged, and dived into the kitchen. Had it been there blinking at her, the stove that was to be, Madame Sam could not have seen it more clearly.

The fish were little, also they were few, but Madame divided them briskly into two piles without pausing to make them smaller by moaning over them. She put some lard into the bottom of a big pot, and when it was hot, dropped one little pile of fish into it. They browned and sizzled and smelt mighty good — so Madame thought. She stirred in some flour and browned it too, then she chopped up a garlic from her garden, and onions — several of them, for Madame was feeling rich to-night — and put in a red pepper from her garden also, and a green pepper, and at last some salt. Then she filled the big pot full of hot water, and clapped the top on to keep the smell in. And she left the soup to boil and boil until there should be no visible sign of the fish but the bones.

It is the custom on the Bayou for Monsieur to eat alone while his Madame serves him. When he has made his

meal, then his wife and children make theirs. But M. Santerre, who differed so from his neighbors in many ways, differed also in this way. He wished his wife and children to eat with him. So while the soup was boiling, Madame Sam set the table. All around the edge of the table she set a row of bowls, and into each bowl she put a spoon and big chunk of bread. The bread was "bake-oven bread." Madame had baked it herself in her own big earthen oven: sweet, wholesome bread, — no alum in it, no alkali, and so dry that a bit of it dropped into milk or soup would swell instantly to four times its size and become delicious. In all the world there is not bread more fit to be the food of man than "bake-oven bread."

Madame poured the boiling soup over the bread in the bowls, and called in the hungry Monsieur and the eagerly sniffing young people:

"Voilà," she cried gaily, "you have for your supper soup of de fish! And if you can't tell 't is fish, you can go look at bones in pot. I don't say dere 's many bones dere, no! But dere 's *some*."

The happy, hungry ones greeted this sally with peals of laughter. Oh, but yes! It is easy to laugh when you thought to sup on dry bread, and have a fine soup set before you. Everybody laughed, that is, everybody but Marie Micou. She had stopped to wash her hands at the well, and was late getting to her place.

After supper the girls washed the bowls and sang over the washing of them, while the boys sat on the steps and told what they were going to be when they grew to manhood. Such a good soup it had been! And Madame, without aid of miracles, had made it of five small fish, minus their heads! Ah, but

then she had put a bit of heart into the pot. That was Madame Sam's way of cooking.

And Madame Sam's heart was glad to-night; so glad, that just as soon as the young people had gone to bed her heart began to share its gladness with her grave Monsieur:

"Voilà, cher," she said, sitting down close beside him on the top step, "we going be rich. Me, I 'm going have kitchen stove!"

The old man turned to her in bewilderment:

"Mais, cherie," he stammered.

Madame laughed.

"'T is das Marie," she said gleefully. "You ain't t'ink when you tell me I must find place for das little girl to sleep, 'cause she ain't got place to sleep, you ain't t'ink den, maybe, das we going be rich because she come. Ha?"

"No," the scholar said honestly, "I

ain't t'ink das. Certainly, certainly, sho."

"Cher, das little girl show me to-day how she can sew. Oui, 't is pretty! She can make mouchoir more fine dan das Madame Celestine on Black Bayou! I go dere to-day. I show das work to dose Mesdames. I tell dem I t'ink maybe Marie can do some work for dem. Dey look at work; dey say yes, she can do work. Voilà, cher, dey say dey give Marie Micou two dollar and fifty cents for make mouchoir. Dey say dey give me ten cents for fetch work. We going be *rich!* And, me, I 'm going have kitchen stove!"

The scholar turned upon her with troubled eyes. He hated so to hurt her, — to take away her joy, — and yet he had to tell her how it was.

"I reckon, cherie," he said gently, "'t is Marie Micou das going be rich. I 'm glad, me, you take her work to dose

Mesdames. I 'm glad dey going give her work, and pay her plenty for make mouchoir. I 'm glad dey going pay you aussi for fetch work. I 'm proud for das! Mais, cherie, das money Marie Micou make, 't is for her. 'T is not for us."

"'T is not for us?" uttered Madame Sam. "Mais," she stammered, "mais —"

"No," the scholar told her gently, "'t is not for us, das money. 'T is for Marie Micou."

Madame Sam was always obedient to her husband's decisions as a 'Cajan wife should be. But to give up her stove without an argument — not even a 'Cajan woman could do that:

"But, cher," she said, "if Marie live wit' us? Voilà, cher! If Josephine or Félicie make some money, das money it is for us?"

"Mais oui, if Josephine or Félicie

make some money — Mais Marie Micou, she ain't child wit' us."

"She live wit' us same like she was our child," Madame protested earnestly. Her stove seemed to be fading away in a cloud of vapors, and she wanted it just where it was in her mind, wanted it also where it was to be in the near future, all black and shiny and beautiful to behold. Her protest became a plea:

"Marie live wit' us same like she was our child. And, me, I t'ink for her same like I t'ink for Félicie."

"Yes," said the scholar, "and 't is kind for you to do like das. But, cherie, she ain't child wit' us. Das money she make wit' her stitch — 't is for her; 't is not for us."

This was final. Madame blinked her eyes a bit as the vision of her stove slipped over the edge of the Is-to-be; but in another minute she had thought of something cheerful.

"Mais voilà, cher. Das ten cents I get for fetch work, das is for me."

And to this the scholar could agree, saying cordially:

"Certainly, certainly, sho! Das ten cents you get, 't is for you. Certainly, certainly, sho!"

"Mais oui! Et voilà, cher," Madame cried on a returning tide of eagerness; "I 'm going buy me pan — petit bassinet, comme-ça!"

"Pardieu," the scholar told her, "dere ain't woman on Bayou so fine like you. I wish, me, I could buy wagon-load of pans for you!"

Madame's laugh rang out:

"Oh, mais non, 't is not load of pan I wish. Ciel! I wish to know, me, where 't is I could put so much pan — But das load, cher. Das make me t'ink! Madame Moise come to Torine's house yesterday, and she was tell me her old man say, soon 's he dig some 'taters he 's going

send us wagon-load for help out wit' Marie Micou. 'T is like he say."

The scholar had, however, to take a learned view of this also.

"I reckon M. Moise did n't know how Marie could make stitch when he send us word like das. I reckon he t'ink Marie Micou can't make some money when he send us word he 's going fetch 'taters. But me, I will go dere to-morrow, and tell him how 't is. Tell him, sho."

Madame Sam made no protest. She saw clearly that the ten cents a week was all she was going to make by the coming of Marie Micou, — all she was going to receive for the extra care and trouble, and the numerous economies the feeding of an additional mouth would make necessary. But that ten cents meant a little pan, and Madame Sam slept soundly on the thought of it.

CHAPTER THREE

A SHAMEFUL THING

M. Santerre, for all his Madame's meekness, was not to settle matters according to his notions of justice, without encountering some opposition.

The next day — as he had said he would do — he went around to the Moise place to tell M. Moise that the load of potatoes would not be needed, to explain why, and to say thank you. M. Moise took it all with his tolerant "sho, sho," but Madame Moise had a question to ask. And Madame Moise's questions, as all the Bayou knew, increased and multiplied exceedingly upon being answered:

"Ha," she cried, all vivacity, "I wish to know what kind of work das Marie Micou do, maybe?"

"She sew," the scholar explained gently.

"Sew? Ma foi! I wish to know, me, what 't is she sew das make her so rich, maybe. All de women on Bayou sew, but dey don't make much money, no!"

"Like you say, Madame," M. Santerre assented courteously.

"But how 't is she sew, ha?" Madame persisted.

M. Santerre spread his hands wide.

"Me, I don't know, Madame. 'T is my Madame das know."

"Eh bien," Madame Moise commented cheerfully, "I reckon your Madame 's going be right proud to have girl das make so much money for her like das. I 'm *glad,* me!" she added heartily.

The scholar looked shocked:

"Oh, mais non, Madame," he exclaimed. "Das money Marie Micou make, 't is for her. 'T is not for us."

Madame Moise eyed him. She knew that the scholar was an impracticable mortal and generally made a mess of things if he had half a chance, but that he should refuse this aid that it would seem the Mother in Heaven had herself sent him — Madame Moise could not believe it. She put a temperate question:

"You going have her pay board same like teacher do, ha?"

M. Santerre shook his head:

"What she eat, das ain't not'ing."

The little Madame sat up, alive to the tips of her lean toes clicked around the rundles of her chair:

"And what 't is your Madame say, maybe?"

"She say like me."

"Den she is one fool," Madame shot off sharply; "one fool, yes! She say what das Marie eat ain't not'ing, ha? Me, ain't I had girls in my house? Ain't I feed dem? Don't I know, me, what

't is dey eat. 'T is *somet'ing,* yes! And 't is de troub'! A boy he come, he go. But de girl — Ma foi! All time 't is to watch. And you say das ain't not'ing? 'T was me, I would take one half das Marie make, to pay me for take care of her. And I reckon, me, your Madame ain't so much — "

But by this time M. Moise had gathered his deliberate forces:

" Bébé," he said, and Madame halted mid-career like a baying beagle suddenly caught in leash.

M. Santerre availed himself of the pause to take courteous leave and Madame availed herself of his departure to break forth afresh:

" Mais, cher, I t'ink, me, 't is shame. Ma foi! I never did see shame so much like das. Madame Sam, she have so many children, and she have such hard time for feed dem. And I know, me, she ain't fool like he say! 'T is him. All

time he go make mess. And he ain't going let her have any of das money. Not any 't all. 'Das ain't right.' Ha, I wish to know if he t'ink 't is right to work his Madame 'till she 's most dead, maybe?"

"Sho, sho," Monsieur sympathized. Then he thought about it.

"I reckon Sam sets heap of store by his Madame. Heap of store, sho. And I reckon maybe das Marie ain't going give her so much troub'. Seems like she 's nice little t'ing."

Madame turned upon him protestingly:

"Oh, cher," she appealed, "ain't she pretty — das Marie? An' ain't pretty girl all time going make troub'? You got to watch. Watch in de winter and watch in de summer. Ma foi! When my Camille make marry, I say, me, 'T'ank God I can stop watch de boys so much!'"

"Sho, sho," Monsieur said, then he added thoughtfully:

"I wish to know, me, where 't is she come from — das Marie."

Madame instantly forgot former cares in the zest of it:

"And me, I *wish* to know!" she cried. "What you t'ink, cher?"

M. Moise turned in his chair. He was a very large man with a large head, and his face was large also with a small black mustache that turned up at the ends, and with small, finely drawn black eyebrows. They were eyebrows that went up in protest or question; went down in disappointment; drew together with annoyance, or parted broadly with pleasure; rather wonderful eyebrows, doing with ability all that the slow tongue left undone. They stood at their natural expression of thoughtfulness now as M. Moise made answer to Madame's question.

"Dere was man at mill to-day, and

he was talk! Talk heap, sho. I hear him say how 't is dey have yellow fever in city, and das de people yonder been run like dey was scared." He turned again, his brow going up in explanation. "Dey run to get away from fever — "

"And you t'ink Marie run aussi," Madame broke in. "Ma foi! you reckon her people is all — *dead,* maybe?"

M. Moise considered it, then pronounced slowly:

"I should t'ink somebody would ask her das."

Madame went off at half cock:

"Ask her! Ma foi, cher, you reckon dere is woman or child on Bayou das ain't ask her das ten times already? But what good it do? Das Marie, she cry! She look scare! She don't say not'ing, no." And at that, Madame's wits darted back to the first issue:

"I *wish* to know, me, how 't is she 's going sew. Voilà, cher. I t'ink, me, I

go now see Madame Sam. 'T is long time I ain't been to see her. 'T is shame!"

Monsieur agreed with his slow, wise smile; and it was not until his little Madame had smoothed her hair, and put on her sun-bonnet that he spoke again. Then he said:

"Bébé, you ain't going say not'ing to Madame Sam 'bout das money. 'T is like Sam say — 't is for Marie Micou."

"Me, I t'ink," Madame told him frankly, "if people owe for t'ing, den people should pay for t'ing. If Sara don't make das Marie pay for what she do for her, I t'ink she will be fool. 'T is *das* I am going tell her."

"Mais, Bébé," Monsieur pointed out deliberately. "'T is for M. Santerre to say. 'T is his house."

At that, Madame Moise, who was half way down the steps, snatched off her bonnet and faced around:

"His house! Oh, cher!" she appealed, "you t'ink das scholard even going have *shade* to sit in if 't is n't for das fine femme he 's got?"

"Sam works hard," Monsieur said kindly.

"Yes," Madame agreed, "he works hard but, ma foi! he don't *do* not'ing."

She put on her bonnet again, and M. Moise held his peace.

With his chair tipped back and his eyes looking solemnly ahead, the big Monsieur watched his little Madame's black bonnet as it bobbed and bobbed along, past the bake-oven in the lane, past the cow-pen gate, and on and on until it became but a blur bobbing along the pasture fence. As the black blur bobbed out of sight, M. Moise broke into a chuckle of deep appreciation:

"Mon Dieu, das great girl, das Bébé! Great girl, sho!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SHIVER IN THE SUNSHINE

MADAME SAM'S father and mother had loved each other — long before she was born, long afterwards — and Madame Sam's eyes showed it, so dark they were, and so lighted by the living fire. Madame Sam might, with her fine physique, live to be a very old woman, but her eyes would never age. Out of a face withered like parchment, they would peer with a vitality undaunted — born of love.

Madame Moise was thinking of her friend's eyes, as her black bonnet bobbed along. When she thought of her friend's wrongs Madame always thought of her friend's eyes — of that sweet beauty dreaming forever in their depths, and

the thought of it added greater heat to her indignation.

"And I know, me," she said aloud, "I know she is going do like he say. I know das. Ma foi! I wish to know me, for what a man wants to be scholard like das."

As she spoke, a vision of the old man, gaunt, pathetic, stooped by ineffectual toil, rose before her, but Madame Moise fortified her resolution, promising herself pluckily:

"I 'm going say to Sara what 't is I t'ink. Mais oui, 't is right das she make Marie Micou pay her for what she do for her. And, me, I am going to say das."

Madame's bonnet bobbed faster and faster. She was fairly out of breath by the time she reached the Santerre gate, but she caught all her breath in again with a gasp as she looked at the gallery. Marie, who had been sewing there (on

Sunday!) had arisen at her approach and was looking at her with black eyes like a flame. Like a flame, yes, but like a flame that quivered. Was it fear?

"Ma foi!" said Madame, then she greeted kindly:

"Bon jour, Marie. Comme-ça-va?"

"Bien, merci. Et toi?" Marie replied, but though she stuck bravely to her 'Cajan bon-ton, Marie also glanced eagerly along the line of retreat that lay open to her, and in a breath had slipped into it, saying:

"I will tell Madame."

"S'il vous plaît," Madame Moise said with her best air. She looked after Marie with reflective eyes:

"I wish to know, me, if she have head — or not? If she ain't got head, I don't want to say not'ing. No! Maybe 't is *das* how scholard t'ink. Me, I ain't t'ought — if she ain't got head — "

If such was the case, M. Santerre's

course was indeed justified. Not on Bayou Bienvieu was there a being so brutal as to demand scot or lot of the weak-minded ones. Madame Moise, alive and alert always, was not hard-hearted. When Madame Sam had come out with some work in her hands and given cordial greeting, Madame put aside her first intention and opened with a tentative question:

"I hear, me, you going keep das Marie Micou wit' you all time?"

"Mais oui," Madame Sam assured cordially. "She come; she say she want stay."

"She look like nice girl," Madame Moise commented. "And she can work, maybe?"

"She is a nice girl," Madame Sam said, and then she shrugged her lips, and her eyebrows, and her shoulders, and shook her head. "She can't cook much, no."

"Can't cook! Ma foi! Before, I ain't never hear of girl das can't cook."

"An' me eit'er," Madame Sam agreed cordially. "Mais Marie, she can't cook much. Et, Camille!" she confided, — "she can't wash 't all."

Madame Moise slipped up on to the front edge of her chair:

"Sara," she whispered, "you reckon she 's got head, maybe?"

Madame Sam dropped both hands into the pan of beans:

"I don't know. Holy Mot'er! sometime I t'ink yes; sometime I t'ink no. But, ah, heaven! she can sew! Me, I wish you to see how she sew. Two dollar and fifty cents for one mouchoir! And she tell me yes, she can make it in two week! And seem like it make her glad to sew. When I fetch her some work from dose Mesdames on Black Bayou — Oh, she was proud! She t'ank me so much. And she say, 'Oh, Madame! if

I make dis nice you will fetch me some more — s'il vous plaît! S'il vous plaît!' And when I tell her 'Oui, me,' — ah, she was proud some more. And she do das work nice. 'T is pretty! My Josephine and Félicie dey watch and watch, and dey say: 'Oh, mamma! Why 't is we can't do some work so pretty like das?'"

"Maybe 't is dey can learn," Madame Moise put in keenly.

"Dey been try," Madame Sam said, but she did not say it very cheerfully. Even her stout cheer was not proof against the dismal failure her daughters had made of that trying; and as she spoke now her stove seemed to be farther away than it had ever been.

"'T would be fine for you if dey could learn," Madame Moise said in warm sympathy for the unsaid sorrow.

"Yes," said Madame Sam, and then the heartache came forth, smiling, but a bit sad in the eyes:

"I could get stove den, maybe."

Madame Moise slipped farther toward the edge of her chair:

"Voilà. Maybe you will get stove yet. I hear me you going get das little pan you been wish to get for so long."

Madame Sam broke into glad laughter:

"Mais oui; I 'm going have *das pan.* And first time I bake some cornbread in it, I 'm going send you piece."

Madame Moise echoed the merry peal:

"Merci!" Then she grew grave with a serious question:

"You going get right round pan, Sara; or, you going get little long pan, maybe?"

Eh bien, here was a perplexity the two Mesdames might well twist and turn till sundown. And with such a zest did they return to it again and again, that the day grew late, and Madame Moise went

home at last, leaving unsaid all the savage things she had come to say.

It was an omission that Madame Moise confessed to Monsieur but justified by saying:

"You know somet'ing, cher? Das Marie Micou, I don't believe, me, she 's got head, no!"

M. Moise considered it during supper, and afterwards too; and yet when Madame came to sit by him while he smoked his cigarette, he could only take his eyes from the far-away pine tops with a doubtful shake of his head, saying:

"I don't know, me, if she 's got head or not."

There was one member of the Moise household who expressed no doubt as to the presence of a head on Marie's sweetly sloping shoulders, and that was Aluin — their solid six-foot son, — their only boy.

Many and deep were the reasons why

Aluin should be cherished by his parents with an especial tenderness. He was not, in the eyes of the Bayou, their only son. His brother, their first born, had died in all the beauty of his babyhood; and the buoyancy of the parents' youth, its boastful strength, had been buried with their baby boy. The slow, wistful years that followed brought to Monsieur and Madame at last a baby girl, very dainty, very dignified. They called her Camille and loved her — and waited. And again the years were kind and gave another girl, one that grew to be big-souled and faithful. They called her Marie, and Madame loved her with pride and tenderness because she was so like her father. And then the big Monsieur and his little Madame waited, wistfully, patiently, for fifteen years. Camille was married; Marie engaged to be married, before the boy they prayed for, came, — came to the amazement of

everybody on the Bayou save Madame Moise.

"Ain't I been ask Mary to give me boy?" the little Madame had cried joyously. "Ain't I been make my Aves every day for nineteen years? And voilà, my Aluin!"

M. Moise had said nothing in the midst of all the congratulations and the merriment, but in the silence that came after he had said hungrily to his Madame:

"Das boy we got, he look now just like he look den."

And it was this that had locked Aluin so closely into his father's heart. He was to him the other little chap come back again. Always the little lost one come again. He was very quiet about it, was the big Monsieur. Not even his Madame knew how it was with him until one day when Aluin was sick with measles, very sick, and her stoutly set,

well balanced Monsieur dropped his head into her lap with a moan:

"Bébé, I believe, me, I will go dig me grave and get ready for die. I can't stand to lose him again. No! I can't stand to lose him again."

Madame had cried over him; cried for him; all a woman may do for a man's anguish. For her own anguish she had prayed meekly to the pitying Mother in heaven.

And now it was this Aluin, coveted by every Monsieur and Madame who had a daughter to be married, smiled at by all the girls, envied by all the boys, this pet and pride and hero, who had decided for himself that Marie Micou "had head."

Marie was, indeed, beautiful with that glimmer of Italian blood in the glow of 'Cajan beauty. But more than her beauty was the appeal made by her strange loneliness. The pathos of it

went to Aluin's heart, and it was that he thought of whenever he heard her name.

Upon the pause left by his father's doubtfulness, Aluin spoke now from his place on the step:

"Mamma, you reckon when Madame Sam get her little pan she 's going kiss das stranger girl good-night, maybe?"

"Ma foi, Aluin! I reckon she kiss her good-night now."

Aluin shook his head:

"No, Félicie tell me. She say dere ain't nobody kiss Marie good-night. And she say Marie tell her she ain't got no papa and she ain't got no mamma."

"Pauvre bébé," Madame cried softly.

Monsieur said huskily:

"Sho, sho," and without stopping to consider it he asked his madame: "And when you go dere to-day, you kiss her? No?"

"No," said Madame, and, in a rage

of regret, she began to defend her conduct:

"I did n't have chance for kiss her, cher. Did n't have chance 't all. She make me bow and she say, 'I tell Madame,' and she dive in house. I did n't have chance 't all."

"I reckon everybody should be kind wit' her — kind as dey can," Monsieur observed gently.

"Mais oui," Madame agreed. "'T is so I t'ink aussi. But me, I did n't have chance — she go dive in house so quick. Ma foi! I never did see girl dive in house so quick like das!"

Aluin spoke up deliberately:

"If any boy on Bayou tease her, he 's going have to lick me, or he 's going have to take licking."

"Sho, sho!"

M. Moise said it slowly, but to the bottom of his being he was tingling with pride in his boy.

Madame was herself again with a hearty:

"Ma foi, Aluin! I never did see boy so like his papa," and then broke into merry laughter because of the flush she had brought to Monsieur's broad face.

And so in a glow, with wet eyes and laughter, the parents pledged themselves to many a weary hour and heartache of wretchedness, not dreaming that they pledged it, sitting so happily together in the evening light.

For a week the world that was Bienvieu went on as usual — brave and glad and beautiful. It was L'Un Paul who sent the first shiver through the serenity of that sunny atmosphere, and his manner of doing it was all L'Un's own.

The teacher had made a rule: books, slates, and pencils should not be dropped on the floor. If anybody broke this rule, it was "keep your seat at recess." On the Friday following Madame Moise's call

upon Madame Sam, in the middle of the afternoon session, a book fell, loudly, to the floor. And L'Un's voice rang like an echo to the bang the book made:

"'T was Marie Micou drop book!"

The teacher looked down the room to the desk where the twins, L'Un and L'Autre, were seated together. L'Un was standing in his seat, L'Autre, more solemn-visaged than ever, was wagging his blond head in earnest negation.

"I don't do not'ing, me," he muttered, anxiously meeting the teacher's eye, "I don't do not'ing. I don't do not'ing, me; I don't do not'ing —"

L'Un faced round on him sternly:

"And me eit'er! I don't do not'ing! 'T is Marie Micou drop book!"

"*'T was not Marie Micou drop book!*"

The denial came like a blow, and Aluin Moise stepped out upon the floor and faced the teacher. "L'Un tells lie!"

At that, Hérbert, L'Un's big brother, high-headed, high-spirited, was out on the floor also, his eyes blazing.

"L'Un don't tell lie," he declared, and his voice rang like a challenge, — eh bien, like a cry also! A lie was a bitter thing to Hérbert Paul. His father was so great a liar that the Bayou had nicknamed him "Le Menteur," and since babyhood Hérbert's spirit had suffered beneath the black reproach. With all the fervor of his boyhood he had urged it upon his little brothers never to lie. He could not, would not, believe that L'Un was lying now.

Aluin folded his large arms calmly:

"If L'Un say Marie Micou drop book, he lie; and if any man wants to fight, he can come to me and get all he wants."

Marie's head went down on her desk with a sobbing wail:

"Oh, mais non, mais non! All time

't is de troub'. And, me, I don't wish — non! I don't wish — I will stay de recess; I will drop de book; mais not to make de troub'. Non, non, non!"

Aluin's face darkened at the sound of that sobbing. He stepped forward with a long step, towering above the slender, dauntless Hérbert. But at the sight of his idolized older brother in such peril, little L'Autre's voice escaped him in a scream of terror:

"Look! Hérbert's book on floor!" he shrieked. "Look! Hêrbert's book on floor!"

L'Un whirled upon him like a fury:

"Ferme! Godamit, I was watch for chance to pick it up!"

A stillness came, sharp as the catching of a breath, and then breaking the stillness came the laughter of Félicie Santerre, merry, rocking with fun, bubbling over with the ridiculousness of it. At the sound of that laughter the school

must grin and giggle; the teacher look less indignantly outraged. And yet, the black eyes, for all their smiling, were very busy, — flashing from the speller that had slipped from Hérbert's desk while he was busy writing, to Aluin, still standing, to Marie, still sobbing. That is, all but two pair of eyes in the school were looking at these things! Hérbert, hurt, shocked, angry, was staring at L'Un; while L'Un, scared, smiling unashamed, was looking at Hérbert. He had lied to save his brother, and though that same brother might lick him for doing it, L'Un would do it again to save him again if the chance offered. So said the lift of L'Un's head! But before the school could take note of this, voilà, Félicie had suddenly stopped laughing and gone to studying. The smile died out of the eyes of the children as they looked at her, — out of the teacher's eyes also. Eh bien, it would

be many a long day before Félicie would laugh again like that.

The teacher began to say sharply what she thought of the whole wild break, and the school listened, meek, courteous; but not a pupil heard one word of that indignant speech. From Aluin's back, to Marie's head, and Félicie's bent face, the black eyes flashed, and flashed again. Let the teacher talk.

"Got no head?" L'Un might declare it, but he would find neither boy nor girl to agree with him now in his estimate of Marie Micou. She was no longer a stranger, a child of mystery, a girl who cried. She was Aluin Moise's girl. Let the truth dawn in the older heads of the Bayou as slowly as maybe, the school knew. And some were wondering what Félicie Santerre would do, and if she would stay good friends with Marie; and some were wondering what Marie herself would do in this, her day

of distinction; and one and all were complacently recalling every little kindness they had shown to Marie Micou when she was only a waif from nowhere — everybody but L'Un was doing that.

L'Un stuck manfully to his own opinions and said openly what he thought of Aluin's choice, — said it dry-eyed and disdainful, with a shrug of his stinging shoulders:

"C'est bien, mon frère! you can lick me for lie if you want; but, me, I t'ank God you ain't fool like Aluin Moise is."

"Aluin ain't fool," Hérbert reproved.

L'Un shrugged again:

"Ain't fool, ha? You know for why he don't fetch das Marie Micou's book home for her? Voilà, she ain't got some books for fetch."

CHAPTER FIVE

A MATTER OF MONEY

THE day on which Marie was elected to a seat in the high places, and L'Un got a licking for lying, was Friday. So it was the next day that Madame Sam went to deliver the finished handkerchief to the Mesdames on Black Bayou, and to receive the ten cents due to her for doing it. As Madame Sam swung along with her skirts tucked up, and her shoes in her hand, she thought of the pan she was to buy on her way home. It was to be a round pan and very small, and it was to be all her own. Yet Madame was not so happy as she had thought to be, because Félicie was not well. She had come home from school the day before looking tired and disheartened.

Madame had given her some citronelle tea and made her stay in out of the sun, but the little girl did not seem to be much benefited by the treatment.

"Maybe," Madame Sam sighed as she strode along, "maybe 't is she 's been growing."

Félicie had, indeed, during the past twenty-four hours, been growing; had lain awake all through the night to do it; but Madame, her mother, knew nothing of that. She swung on, the tall, bony Madame, swung on swiftly, her thoughts divided between the little girl that was and the little pan that was to be.

"If she don't get glad when she see das pan, me, I give her some more tea. Maybe 't was not hot enough, maybe 't was das?" Madame pondered it, stepping on in long, springy steps, and lightly, like a deer that walks on fallen forest leaves.

"Maybe 't was das," she decided, and

then found herself fronted by another perplexity:

"I don't know, me, if I should make some cornbread first time in das pan, or if I should bake some 'tater pone."

This was a delicious uncertainty, and it held Madame smiling through her bargaining with the ailing sisters, made her gay with Bat at the store, and brought her home from her long tramp beaming.

M. Santerre was sitting on the steps, so was Félicie and Josephine. Hérbert Paul was there also, waiting for it to grow late enough for him to be left alone with his Josephine.

"Où Marie?" Madame asked of the group.

Josephine shrugged.

"I reckon she 's round to well wash' her hands," she said, and called:

"Vien, Marie! Mamma say 'vien ici!'"

Marie came quickly, drying her hands on her apron:

"Here your money is, Marie," Madame Sam said kindly, and held out to her the handful of bright silver.

Marie drew back sharply and dropped her hands.

"'T is not for me," she said.

"Mais oui, 't is for you. 'T is for das mouchoir you make."

"'T is not for me," said Marie again, and her eyes went flashing in fire-bright appeal from face to face.

"Mais oui," Madame Sam insisted. She stood tall and rigid in the slanting light; her shoes still in her left hand, her pan under her arm, her right hand holding forth the silver. Under her black bonnet the sun's rays struck and shone redly on her earnest face. "'T is your money, ma fille," she insisted kindly.

Marie shrank back, timid, proud, her

dark eyes wet and baffled-looking, but her hands indignantly sweeping away the proffered payment.

"Non, non, non! 'T is not for me. Quoi! Tu parlerais comme — You give me bed and bread — You — " Marie looked appealingly from face to face for comprehension and fell back upon barren denial:

"'T is not for me, no! 'T is not for me."

It was time for the scholard to take a hand, and he took it with a scholarly exposition:

"Voilà, Marie. What Madame give you, 't is not'ing. Already she have bed and bread. 'T is not like she go get das and give it you. If you ain't here, she have it. If you here, she have it aussi. 'T is not like she pay money for give you bed, or for give you bread. Already she have it before you come. But you, you work for make mouchoir

and you get money for mouchoir and voici! l'argent est pour vous. And you can take your money and go to store and buy you somet'ing — some dress, some ribbon, some shoes maybe. Den when fourt' Sunday come you can go to church, and be fine like ot'er girls. And won't das be nice, ha?"

Marie's reply was a denial and a cry:

"Non, non, non! 'T is not for me. 'T is for Madame."

"Mais, ma bébé," Madame took up the argument, "you must do like Monsieur say. You must take money and go to store and make your buy. Den you be fine like l'autres."

Marie's head went down in despair:

"I don't want," she sobbed, "I don't want!"

"You don't want to be fine like l'autres?" Madame questioned gently, but dumbfounded. "You don't wish — " She turned for assistance to Josephine,

to Félicie; but they were staring in helpless amazement at Marie Micou, and Hérbert Paul was staring also. A girl who did not want pretty dresses and ribbons was enough to make the little brown bayou itself stare. And as the young people stared, they had to remember what L'Un had said, had to remember also that though L'Un was little and lean and only eight years old, he was shrewd — uncannily shrewd. Madame Sam saw what was in their faces and her own face grew grave:

"Voilà, cherie," she coaxed. "Here your money is, and I wish das you take it. If you don't, Monsieur will go to M. Moise and tell him how 't is."

Marie's sobbing stopped short.

"Go to M. Moise?" she cried.

"Mais oui!"

"And what M. Moise say do, 't is das we do, ha?"

"Mais oui."

"And where 't is M. Moise live, if you please?"

"He live down Bayou, close by church."

"By church? Bien! 'T is me will go to M. Moise!"

"Oh, mais non! Marie! Oh, mais non! You will be 'way late."

Madame Sam's deep lungs shouted the warning in vain. Marie was running through the lane, past the canefield almost ready for the knife, past the half-dug potato patch. In a moment, almost, she had left the Santerre farm behind her and was racing down the road that ran through darkening branch and lonesome barrens. And so swiftly did she follow it, that before the branch could grow a shade darker, the barrens a thought more lonesome, she had left them alike to their darkness and their loneliness, and was panting up the slope to the Moise house.

Madame and Monsieur were sitting on the gallery when they caught sight of the little figure flying through the dusk:

"Ma foi!" said Madame, "I wish to know who 't is come so late, and come in so much hurry, maybe?"

Monsieur sat looking steadily at the figure, little more than a shape in the gathering gloom. When he was sure of it he said slowly in reply to Madame's multiplying speculations:

"'T is Marie Micou."

"Marie Micou," Madame uttered. "I wish to know, me, what — Oh, cher, you reckon Madame Sam send her? Late like dis? But no, she won't send her so late. She would send somebody wit' her. Cher, you reckon she 's run away from Madame Sam? Cher —"

But Marie had come to a panting stop at the steps, and Madame must remember her manners.

"Bon soir, Marie," she greeted brightly, "won't you come in house?"

"Non merci. I wish to tell M. Moise — et toi, Madame — how 't is. Madame Sam say what M. Moise say do, das it is to do. Et voilà! Madame Sam, she take me in house, she give me bed, she give me bread, she call me 'Ma fille' — all time she call me das. And me, I ain't got not'ing for give her — not'ing for do. Not'ing 't all. I can't cook for her; I can't wash for her — I ain't never know. So me, I make my ave à Marie — 'Let me do somet'ing for Madame Sam' — all time I make my ave like das. And voici, last week Holy Virgin hear my prayer. She send me mouchoir for make for Madame. And me, I was glad, 't was money dey would pay to Madame for mouchoir. I make mouchoir, and mouchoir make money, and voilà. But Madame Sam come wit' money in her hand and say

to me, 'L'argent est pour vous.' Et Monsieur, aussi, he say, 'L'argent est pour vous.' And me, I say, 'Non, non, non! It is not for me.' And den Madame Sam say, 'Monsieur will go see M. Moise.' — Oh, Monsieur, je vous prie tell Madame it is for her, das money. Everyt'ing she have, she give me some; and me, I ain't got not'ing to give her. Not'ing 'tall, till Holy Virgin send me mouchoir to make for money."

Monsieur said:

"Sho, sho," then he arose courteously.

"I reckon, me," he said thoughtfully. "Better come on gallery and sit in chair."

Marie came up on the gallery, meekly obedient, and sat in a chair. Her eyes glowed, but with folded hands she waited patiently for the big Monsieur to speak.

"Das money," M. Moise began, "das money you get for mouchoir, it is for you — "

"Mais non, Monsieur! Mais non!" Marie broke in eagerly.

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur, and he considered it again, Madame, his wife, twisting her fingers, and snapping her toes, in a vain effort to hurry him. At last he put it very plainly to the pleading girl:

"If a man do work and get his pay for work he do, das money it is for him. And wit' girl it is as wit' man. Das money she get for work she do, das money is for her."

"But Madame Sam! She give me bread, she give me bed," Marie cried. "What money I make, 't is for her."

Monsieur considered it yet again:

"If," he said weightily, "if when you go to live wit' Madame Sam you had say to her, 'Voilá, Madame, you give me bread and bed, and me, I give you money I make' — den das money would be for her. But you ain't say das, no?"

"No," Marie admitted unhappily, "I ain't say das, mais — "

But at this juncture Madame Moise dashed into the game:

"Oh, cher! If Marie make money wit' mouchoir, it is *her* money. And if it is *her* money she can do wit' it like she *wish*. She can burn it up, maybe. She can t'row it in Bayou, maybe. And if she can t'row it or burn it, she can make buy wit' it. Buy what she wish — buy *stove* for Madame Sam, maybe."

"Buy stove," Marie cried. "Mais, me, I don't know if she wish for stove — "

"But me, I know she wish for stove," Madame Moise assured briskly. "Before she have baby she tell me, 'Tudieu! when I get rich I will have stove first t'ing.' Das baby, he is grown man, wit' boy big like *dis*, but Madame Sam ain't got her stove yet. It is for eight dollars you can buy stove. Not any

pots, no! De pots is more. Mais 't is — " Madame was warming to a price list, when Marie, who had risen eagerly, dropped back to her chair with a moan:

" Eight dollar! And das money I get, 't is only two dollar and fifty cents."

" Mais voilà, cherie," Madame cheered thriftily. " You can keep das money and make not'er mouchoir, and not'er again, till you have money for stove. And *den!* Ma foi! Dere won't be woman on Bayou so proud like Madame Sam."

" Dieu merci," Marie cried. " And Madame Sam she will be proud. Dieu merci. Ah, Madame, I t'ank you. Ah, I will sew. I will make de center, I will make de side. I will make many mouchoir, and I will buy pots. Dieu merci. I t'ank you, Madame. And Monsieur aussi."

Madame laughed out with a rush of

wet merriment, and Monsieur said, "Sho, sho," and added pointedly:

"But das money you make, 't will be for you — "

Marie was up and off like a flash, while Madame cried after her in alarm:

"But wait, Marie. You better stay night wit' me. 'T is too late; 't is too late — "

Marie dared not stop to hear lest the big Monsieur should spoil her chance to make Madame Sam proud. Proud, yes! And Marie, running, repeated the words of Madame Moise:

"Dere won't be woman on Bayou so proud like das." Ah, what a fine smart woman was Madame Moise!

"And maybe 't will make Félicie glad aussi!"

How the night wind sang in the pine-trees! How merrily the frogs croaked in the flats!

Back there on her front gallery Ma-

dame Moise was also hearing the night wind and the frogs. She wiped a quiver from her lips and cried to her big Monsieur:

"T'ank God! Sara 's going have das stove before she 's dead."

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur, and added thoughtfully, "I reckon, me, das Marie Micou 's pretty nice little girl."

"She fine!" Madame cried. "She 's fine. Oh, I pray God, me, not'ing don't happen to her till she buy stove for Sara!"

"I don't reckon dere anyt'ing going happen to her," M. Moise submitted. "Dere ain't not'ing ever happens to anybody on Bayou."

"No," Madame admitted, "dere ain't not'ing ever happens to anybody on Bayou. But das Marie Micou," Madame paused to fling her hands wide, "she 's different. Eh bien, and Marie Reneau! You ain't forget *das*, cher?"

Forget it! Could anybody on the Bayou ever forget how Victor Reneau's pretty young sister had run away with a man who sold bananas? — run away because she dared not tell her brother that she loved the man he disliked, lest in the blind rage that seizes a 'Cajan in his anger he should kill her lover as heedlessly as he would have killed a lizard! Run away and never dared to come back, the poor, pretty young girl! — banished from the Bayou forever.

M. Moise shook his head slowly:

"Das hurt Reneau bad, Bébé. And it hurt him yet," he added with deliberate emphasis, and turned his head toward her:

"'T was last week I was down to store — me and Victor and Zeno Paul. Mon Dieu, das Zeno, he don't never t'ink what 't is he is going say! While we were stand dere on gallerie, one of dose banana fellows come 'long. And

you know what 't is Zeno say? — loud as he can say — 'Voilà, banana man! Watch out, watch out he don't steal girl from somebody.'"

"Ah," Madame uttered. "And M. Reneau, he hear das?"

"Mais oui, he hear! He was stand right dere. He go down steps quick and get on horse, but I see, me, he was hurt. I said to Zeno:

"'Mon Dieu, Zeno, for why you can't t'ink what 't is you say!'"

"Mais," Madame dashed in briskly, "M. Paul, he don't never t'ink. Never t'ink 't all."

"But he should t'ink, Bébé. Reneau has been kind wit' him—he 's all time give him job. And das hurt Victor for him to say t'ing like das. Hurt him, sho."

It was, and always had been, Madame Moise's opinion that M. Reneau deserved a hurting. Her sympathies had ever been with the little girl that had

been scared into exile. She said with conviction:

"Mais, cher, M. Reneau was hard on das little sister he have. Ma foi, 't is for girl to say who 't is she will make marry wit'. 'T is *not* for son frère."

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur. Then he considered it:

"He had raised her like she was child wit' him. She was baby when dere mot'er die and Reneau, he was man wit' beard on face."

"Mais," Madame insisted, "he was hard wit' her when she wished to make marry wit' banana man."

M. Moise could not deny it. Reneau had been hard. So he said:

"'T is long time since she go, eh, Bébé?"

"'T is fifteen years," Madame told him. "Aluin was year old when she go." And she sighed softly, "Eh bien!"

CHAPTER SIX

THE SONG OF THE NIGHT

Marie Micou did not go home alone. On the very first slope a figure loomed through the dusk, coming up where she was going down. A figure in the dusk may hold dreadful possibilities — may, indeed, be bent under a bundle! Marie stopped, a start of fear. Also, a figure in the dusk may promise exquisite pleasure, may be dark-eyed and delicious. Aluin stopped, a start of delight. His voice came deeply, deliberately:

"Bon soir."

"C'est Aluin," Marie breathed. Aloud she said stiffly:

"Bon soir."

Aluin climbed the slope:

"'T is late for you to pass t'rough

woods by yourself," he said, and stopped at her side.

" 'T is not late," Marie declared.

Aluin glanced up at the stars, shining brightly, then down at the hollow, black as night:

" 'T is too late for you to be 'broad by yourself," he said. " I 'm going walk home wit' you, me. I don't wish das you pass t'rough woods by yourself."

" I can go by myself," Marie told him straightly.

Aluin smiled with quick pleasure. This was a new method of treatment. Hitherto, whenever he had placed himself at a girl's side the girl had — eh bien, she had not ordered him away. His mother's only boy; his father's lost boy that had come again; the pride and darling of the Bayou. The big, quiet Aluin was perhaps a little spoilt, — had been fed too much sugar and not enough of life's sharper savors. He

tasted of those savors now with relish — and laughed a little.

"I know, me, you can go by yourself. I know how 't is wit' Mademoiselle Marie Micou; dere ain't girl on Bayou can take care of herself so fine like she can. Mais, maybe 't is if you take my arm you won't stumble so much."

"Non merci!"

"Arretez. 'T is hole you going walk in! Why you don't take my arm?"

"I can walk by myself."

"Mais oui? And maybe 't is you can break neck by yourself, ha?"

Marie raised troubled eyes to heaven. He must not walk with her. He must not! He was for Félicie. But the heavens could give her no help. There was a pale young moon up there — oh, very young! little more than an edge of light, and it seemed to be fleeing in fear from a cloud that followed it like

a threat! An ugly cloud, all squat and bowed together like an old man bent under a bundle! Marie's eyes fled from the ugly cloud to the big fellow at her side. How strong and kind he was, and she — she was afraid.

"Me, I 'm going walk home wit' you," Aluin announced deliberately. But he knew that he could not go if she forbade him.

Marie did not forbid him. Her only reply was to walk so fast that Aluin's shoulders began to swing to his stride as he kept his place beside her. But he did keep his place; and with a ready hand to save, and many a word of warning, he guided her down the slope and through the water-worn hollow.

"Where 't is you been abroad?" he asked as they left the dark branch and came out into the more open barrens. "You been far, maybe?"

"I been to your papa's house," Marie told him briefly.

"Quoi!" Aluin uttered, then quickly, "You been talk wit' mamma?"

"Yes," Marie said.

"Yes?" Aluin repeated. Something warm and sweet seemed to stoop from the stars to touch him, and at the touch a glad feeling ran through him, making him happy. Aluin wondered at it. He had been happy before — many times before, — when their cow had twin calves; when he found the steer that had strayed; when he killed his first deer; happiest of all when his little mare had won the race; happy many times and for many reasons. But never before had he been happy just because a girl had talked to his mother. Nor had he ever before been happy like this. When his mare won he had shouted until his throat hurt. He did not want to shout now. He did not want to talk

— not even to Marie. If he could have stopped breathing he would have been glad. Along he swung at Marie's side, guarding her, but the stars stooping over the pine trees were not more silent. The darkness deepened in the woods as the wonder deepened in his breast. Fragrant and fine and full of half-thought things, the night lapped them round. Ah, if it might but be this way forever, the silence and the woods and Marie Micou! But even as he thought it, there came to Aluin a sharp and sudden sense of loss. He stopped, turned around, peered into the night, called into the silence an eager whisper:

"Marie! Marie!"

The darkness gave back to his peering only darkness; the night wind brought in answer only his whisper's echoed faintness. She had been there and she was not there. Silently as a shadow sinks into deeper shadows Marie

had slipped from his side. Without a warning stir of breath or clothing, without the patter of a footfall.

"Mon Dieu, I wish to know if she have wings." Standing still with his perplexity, baffled, staring into the night, Aluin saw a broad lane of light flung into the darkness straight ahead. The red lane streamed through the shadows for an instant, then all was dark again. Aluin knew what that meant. Somebody had opened and shut a kitchen door. He roused and took notice of his whereabouts. It was true, he was very near to the Santerre house.

"Eh bien," he said resolutely, "I reckon, me, I can know if she got home all right, maybe."

Madame Sam was sitting on the gallery. She had been sitting there since dark, waiting and watching for Marie to come.

Aluin gave her a courteous "Bon

soir" and asked his question — not an easy one for a boy of sixteen to ask:

"Has Marie Micou got home yet, Madame?"

"Mais oui," Madame told him. "'T is just now I hear her come in."

"Merci," said Aluin. He turned quickly and made for the gate; but alone with the night again he began to smile.

Madame Sam did not begin to smile. Félicie was her favorite daughter. Félicie and Aluin had always been good friends. And voilà. Aluin had come asking about Marie Micou — had come for that and for nothing more.

"And me," Madame moaned, "I give Félicie citronelle tea! I give her citronelle tea!" Madame Sam put her hands together in a rage of compassion, all the woman in her aching to the ache in her little girl's heart:

"And me, I give her tea!" Her worn

hands wiped away the wistful tears, but they came again. What could she give if tea availed not?

"Not'ing, not'ing," Madame admitted. For such a hurt there is no salve save time.

"'T is only God can give de time," she said, "and He give it — slow, yes."

Eh bien, there was no hurt in Aluin's heart as he swung swiftly along his homeward way. Often he smiled — the smile that slips slowly to the lips, trembles there, draws away, comes deepening back — but only once did he laugh aloud.

"And she run away! 'T was quick how she do das. Quick, sho!"

Aluin was not thinking. He was tasting life in quick, shy sips and waking to the sweetness of it. Out there all alone with the wood's noises and the night it was delicious. Yet he did not

linger with delight. He walked so fast that in a little while the barrens had swept down to the hollow, the slope had climbed out of the dark, and he was nearing his father's gallery, was waking to a consciousness of the commotion that reigned within his father's gate. A voice strong, vibrant, reached him saying:

"Voilà, Moise! You ain't fool. You know like me — "

"M. Reneau," Aluin said, and began to think once more:

"I wish to know, me, what 't is he want wit' papa now. All time he go get in troub', and den come trot to papa for pull him out."

This was not a very reverent reflection. M. Reneau was his father's life-long friend, and, also, he was the richest sheep-owner on the Bayou. But Aluin was a lord to-night, — a bit drunk with his lordship. He went up the steps to

a seat by his father like a man among men:

"Bon soir, M. Reneau," he greeted genially. "'T is nice night we have."

"'T is dark like devil, yes," the sheep magnate told him promptly.

M. Moise lifted his big head and looked abroad.

"Dark, sho," he assented thoughtfully. "Ha, Aluin, I reckon, me, you ain't hear how 't is?"

"Non, papa; I ain't hear not'ing," Aluin told him cheerfully. "What 't is?"

"You ain't hear, no," snorted the magnate. "Old men hear bullfrog croak in swamp; but young man can't hear not'ing but bird sing in bushes." Unconsciously, in his exasperation, M. Reneau made this acknowledgment of Aluin's claim to manhood. M. Moise, in his perplexity, also made acknowledgment, turning to the big fellow who but yester-

day had been a boy as though he turned for counsel:

"'T is bad for Victor, here," he said. "Bad, sho. Man has bought das old place where American man start to build house."

"Bad!" Reneau took up stormily. "But yes, 't is bad. In t'ree mont's 't will be winter! My sheep dey have been trav' t'rough das place for fifteen years. 'T was safe way for dem to trav'. Now dis man go buy place. And first t'ing he going do, — ain't it build fence? And my sheep, dey have to trav' t'rough branch — Pardieu! I 'm going lose hundred head of sheep dis winter. Ha, Moise! Ain't das so? You ain't fool. You know like me, 't is bad branch. Bad for sheep."

"Sho, sho," said M. Moise, and after a thoughtful pause he summed up slowly:

"Yes, sir; I reckon, me, das is 'bout right. Bad branch for sheep. Bad, sho."

The magnate snapped a match and impatiently lit a cigarette. Strong, irascible man that he was, he knew that he could not hurry the big monsieur, and he knew, as every man and madame and little child on the Bayou knew, that none could help in time of trouble as M. Moise could help; nor would any other man so cheerfully carry his neighbor's load.

After a long pause M. Moise took up the talk again, saying thoughtfully:

"I reckon, me, I better go over dere Monday and see das man. He should build two fence dere, but I don't know if he will wish to build two fence or not."

"No," the magnate burst forth, "he *won't* wish to do das! You reckon dere is man in world going wish to build two fence if he ain't *got* to do das. Me, I t'ink better go tell him he 's *got* to do das."

M. Moise shook his head slowly:

"Mais he ain't got to do das. 'T is his land, and if he don't wish to leave lane, he ain't got to leave lane. Das is law."

The magnate had reached this point in his argument just ten times before Aluin came. He got up now and stood towering in all his muscular height above his solid friend.

"My God, Moise!" he said.

From inside the house Aluin thought there came a sound as if his mother was struggling with smothered laughter, and he grinned in sympathy, safe under the cover of the night M. Reneau had found so dark.

M. Moise said, "Sho, sho," and added: "'T is his land. Dere ain't any law for make him leave lane if he don't wish."

"And you t'ink he 's going *wish* to leave lane, maybe?" Reneau asked dryly. Then burst forth in impatience: "Well,

me, I *don't!* Voilà, Moise. If you and me and Jean Champetre don't go down dere and put up stiff talk, das man ain't going leave lane, no! We must tell him straight das he 's *got* to leave lane."

"Mais, he ain't got," Monsieur put in patiently. "'T is his land."

"Damné," commented the magnate helplessly.

M. Moise began over again. But M. Reneau interrupted hastily:

"I reckon, me, I better be going. Bon soir, Moise. Bon soir, Aluin." And the sound of a running pony's hoofs came to the two on the gallery as witness of the mood and manner of his going.

Madame Moise popped out of the house like a bird out of a box.

"Oh, cher!" she appealed. "How many time it is you have told Victor Reneau he should buy das place das cut his land in two? Ain't it hundred times,

maybe? But no! He don't do like you say. He keep fool along, fool along. 'I don't reckon, me, somebody 's going buy das place.' 'T is das how he say. Et voilà! Somebody buy das place! I t'ink, me, he have face to come beg you for help him wit' troub'! If he had do like you tell him hundred times to do, he won't have troub'."

"Sho, sho. Mais, I don't know, me, if 't is hundred times I tell him das or not."

There was a thoughtful pause that even Madame could not interrupt, and M. Moise sighed heavily as he broke the pause, saying:

"And I don't know, me, if das man is going wish to leave lane."

Aluin spoke up with interest:

"What man das is, ha, papa?"

M. Moise roused and turned to his boy:

"'T is man have bought das place

where American start to build house. 'T was long time ago. Camille was little t'ing den."

Aluin's interest was for the present, and he put it briskly:

"What kind of man he is, maybe, papa?"

"Dey say he is tough lot. Tough lot, sho. But, me, I don't know if he is tough lot or not."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TOUGH LOT

When Marie Micou, panting a little because of the swift race by which she had eluded Aluin, slipped into the Santerre kitchen she found the scholar alone, washing his feet in the shallow tub.

He looked up with gentle inquiry:

"And you ask M. Moise, and he tell you, 'Oui, das money is for you'?"

Marie stood before him with down-dropped eyes:

"Mais oui, Monsieur. He tell me das money is for me."

"And das is right," M. Santerre assented happily. "Yes, sir, certainly, sho. Das is right. M. Moise, he don't never make mistake. De money, 't is dere on shelf. I wish das you take it in your hand now, Marie."

Marie took the money in her hand. The scholar continued kindly:

"One day next week Josephine or Félicie, dey will go wit' you to store and you can make your buy, some ribbon, some hat — "

Marie interrupted hastily:

"Mais non, Monsieur. M. Moise say I must make my buy, what 't is I wish to buy — "

"Certainly," the scholar put in courteously, "certainly, sho. You must buy what 't is you wish to buy. Josephine or Félicie will go wit' you next week."

"I don't wish to buy not'ing next week! Not'ing 't all!"

M. Santerre took his feet out of the tub and said reassuringly:

"Den voilà! You don't buy not'ing next week, not if you don't wish to do das. Comme-ça?"

Marie was escaping with this consent when Madame Sam came in.

"You had some supper, Marie?" she asked kindly.

Marie was bent on getting away, and she backed to the door:

"Merci, Madame. I don't wish some supper. I wish to go to bed."

"You sick?"

"Oh, mais non, Madame. Bon soir, Monsieur. Bon soir, Madame."

Madame Sam stood tall and strong in the flickering firelight until she heard the door of the shed-room creak in closing, then she said:

"'T was Aluin Moise fetch her home."

"Quoi!" uttered the scholar. In his amazement he put his feet back into the tub; in his perplexity he began to wash them vigorously.

"Maybe 't is his papa tell him do das," he suggested. Madame was looking on wearily at the energetic foot-washing.

"And if his papa send him, why he

don't fetch her to gate? Why he tell her good-night in lane? If you had hear him when he ask me if she get home all right. 'T was like he was sing," she replied hopelessly, and added gently:

"'T is two time you have wash your feet, cher."

"Pardieu," said M. Santerre. He got up and went tracking wetly around the room, Madame watching him in troubled abstraction:

"If 't is towel you look for, cher," she said finally, "voilà, 't is in your hand."

M. Santerre looked at the towel he held, and sat down with it, saying:

"Pardieu! I wish to know what Moise will do. Pardieu! I hear, me, Aluin was ready to make fight for Marie one day at school, but I never t'ought, me, 't was das."

"What day das was?" Madame demanded quickly.

"What day?" the scholar questioned,

looking up from the work in hand. "What day? Friday? I believe, me, 't was Friday."

Madame uttered a sound, half inarticulate, of tender compassion:

"'T was day I give her citronelle tea."

"Ha?" said the scholar, "I 'm sorry for M. Moise, yes. 'T will be hard on him. Hard, sho. Et toi, cherie?"

But Madame was thinking of another who would suffer — was suffering. She had no tenderness to spare for her neighbors just then.

"If M. Moise don't wish Aluin to make marry wit' Marie Micou he can tell him like das," she pointed out briefly.

M. Santerre shook his head.

"He can tell him like das, yes. But what good das 'non' going do? Did n't Reneau say non to his little sister when she wish to make marry wit' das banana man? Oh, voici, cherie! When your papa did n't wish for you to make marry

wit' me, ain't he tell you non and non and non? Mais das non, it ain't do no good. If it was girl say non, yes. But, me," he added profoundly, "I don't reckon Marie is going say non to Aluin."

"Say non to Aluin Moise," Madame uttered. "Ma foi, dere ain't girl on Bayou going do like das."

"He 's fine chap," M. Santerre assented with quick pride in his friend's big boy. "Fine chap, sho. Mais, I don't believe he is so fine like our boy Bat is."

"Non," Madame made answer, as she always did to this proposition. "Non, dere ain't boy on Bayou so fine like Bat is." But her heart was not with her boy now, and M. Santerre found witness of that fact in her tone. He looked up anxiously:

"Bat, he ain't been doing not'ing, no?"

"Oh, mais non!" Madame answered.

The scholar was not satisfied with her absent rejoinder. He urged uneasily:

"'T is only last week Bat was tell me how he 's been wanting to get stove for you. Say he *most* have it and voilà, coal go down. But I tell him, me, how 't is you have little pan —"

"Mot'er of God," Madame broke out passionately, "I wish I ain't never had pan — never had pan 't all."

The scholar got up, dropping the towel into the tub, and took the big, bony woman into his arms as tenderly as he had done it in their early days.

"Cherie," he soothed, "it ain't your fault. Moise will know it ain't your fault. Dere ain't woman in world can say what girl is for boy. 'T is for God to say das. Dere ain't woman in world can keep boy from love girl if das is girl for him to love. Voilà, cherie! You t'ink dere is any woman in world — or

any man eit'er, could keep me from love you? Mais non! If dey chop off head and bury me in grave, I would go on love you in de ground same like I love you on top de ground. Certainly, certainly, sho."

All things considered, this stanch testimony to the hopelessness of combating Aluin's love for the wrong girl ought not to have been very comforting, yet Madame Sam was comforted. Her black head nestled into the hollow under the scholar's gaunt, stooped shoulders, his gray head bent to hers, and his toil-twisted hand stroked her cheek with the touch of a lover. The firelight flickered up and fell over them in a gleam; but in the eyes and the hearts of this life-worn man and woman was another gleam — a gleam as of God's own glory.

In the shed-room, with the handful of hard silver in her pillow and her eyes wide open upon the darkness, Marie

Micou lay like one listening. And, indeed, she was listening, — listening to a voice that deeply, boyishly, kept saying over and over all the words that Aluin had said. But it was not Aluin's face she was seeing as she stared into the night. It was a girl's face, sweetly gentle. The face that had bent down to her when she had cowered in the schoolroom, so scared and alone; a face lighted with the glad brown eyes of laughter. But the eyes were not laughing as Marie looked into them now. They had not been laughing when her friend bent down to her last Friday, saying so softly:

"Do not cry, Marie. Do not cry, m' amie."

And Aluin, standing there with his arms folded — wanting to fight for her. Ah, if Félicie had only cried instead of telling the newcomer not to do it! And Marie heard again the boyish voice

talking in the dark, and she thought of the stars that had looked down through the pine-trees. How far away and lonesome and sad they were! She had had to run home quick and get away from them. She could not bear it, to stay there with those stars looking at her just as Félicie's eyes had looked.

"I wish to know if he get mad, maybe? But, me, I don't care if he get mad or not. I wish to be by myself — like stars in sky." And then the voice came again and the face, and her thoughts went tracking round the circle once more, shadowed always by the dark knowledge that followed them as that squat, ugly cloud had followed the frail young moon. Ah, heaven! How lonely the stars had looked all by themselves in the sky!

"But me," Marie resolved, "I 'm going be like stars. I will look; 't is all I will do. I will look."

And yet when the Sunday morning broke so sweet and clear with the cool dew over everything and the fog stealing away from the Bayou, Marie was not ready to take up her rôle of star; not ready to become a mere looker-on. She was young, and her heart would beat and drive the blood to her cheek, and the bright light to her eyes. Her lips might lie, but if her cheek and eyes were going to tell the truth like that — If just thinking about seeing him made her face shine like that —

Marie turned away from the little looking-glass, before which she had been brushing her hair, and went into the kitchen, where Madame Sam was getting some flour for the girls to powder their faces. It was the fourth Sunday in the month, the only Sunday when services were held at the Bayou church. Everybody was getting ready to go to mass. Madame Sam had already put

on her shoes and her best dress and was scooping up the flour carefully lest she spill the dust of it on her black skirt.

"Ah, Marie," she said turning, "ain't you most ready, no?"

"Non, Madame. I don't wish to go to mass."

Madame put the flour on the table and drew back from it.

"You don't wish to go to mass!" she repeated.

"Non, Madame."

"Marie," Madame Sam said sternly.

"Yes, Madame," said Marie. She stood with down-dropped lashes and her eyes upon the clean hands clasped before her.

"Marie, you mean it? You don't wish to go to *mass?*"

"Yes, Madame."

Madame looked at her almost stupefied with amazement for a moment.

Then an idea flashed into her active mind. A terrible idea.

"Marie," she asked in horror, "ain't you Catholic?"

"Oh, mais oui, Madame. 'T is t'ree year I make my first communion."

"And you don't wish to go to mass, ma fille?"

Marie had to modify her statement. Her manner grew more meek, her lashes more down dropped, and she said:

"'T is only to-day I do not wish to go, Madame. Next mass we have I will go."

Madame's mind presented another idea, one not at all terrible, save in its pitifulness.

"She 's shamed because she ain't got nice clothes," Madame reflected. Aloud she said very kindly:

"Eh bien, ma fille. 'T is for you to say if you wish to go or not. 'T will be only t'ree hours we be gone. You

won't be scared to stay in house by yourself?"

"Oh, mais non, Madame!"

So Marie stayed at home and thriftily worked on a handkerchief, while the church-goers went forth to attend the solemn service of their creed, to be steadied and comforted by the serene counsel of their priest, to be heartened by the handclasps of their neighbors, and, eh bien, to be brightened by a bit of gossip.

Everybody was at church that day. Such a beautiful Sunday! And then, too, it was expected that the man who had bought the American's place, the man whom all the men had pronounced a "tough lot," but whom few of the women had had a chance to see, — voilà, it was expected that this man would be at church also.

The worshipers came in, group by group, and sedately took places in the

customary pews. Sometimes a Madame leaned back to whisper:

"I wish to know, me, what is his name, maybe?"

Or, another Madame leaned forward to answer:

"I hear, me, 't is Clausel Camusette. Mais, I *don't* know!"

The man who was such a "tough lot" did not come early. M. Moise and Madame came, and the priest with them. M. Aluin also came, smiling to himself with satisfaction when he missed one face from the Santerre group. Even when M. Dupré, who always came late, had arrived with his poor, half-witted son, the "tough lot" had not come. But a silence had fallen upon the waiting groups; a little bell giving forth now and then its silver tinkle; a man's voice reverently intoning the Latin chants; responses murmured, many-toned, solemn; the stir of a crowd that knelt as one,

or, as one, rose from its kneeling; the words of the priest, full-voiced, earnest, sympathetic, as of a father speaking to children he loved; a blessing besought; a benediction given — one of these sounds had covered the sound of a step that softly entered the church. Which sound had covered it no member of the congregation knew. But when the church-goers turned to leave the church, there, grim and watchful, just inside the door, stood Clausel Camusette. His small, unwinking eyes peered into every face that passed him, as though he had come to church, not so much for the purpose of hearing mass, as for the sake of seeing what his neighbors looked like.

"Ma foi," Madame Moise whispered to her big Monsieur, "I wish to know, me, if he 's 'fraid he ain't never going have chance to see some people 'gain, maybe?"

If M. Camusette passed the congregation in review as it left the church, the congregation had its chance when M. Camusette left the churchyard. It paused as by common consent, and watched him intently until he was out of ear-shot. Then everybody began to talk, and Madame Moise caught Madame Sam by the arm with a laugh:

"Voilà! My old man say de don't know if das man is all tough lot or not. What you t'ink, ha?"

Madame Sam was listening to Félicie, laughing as she talked to Aluin.

"Me," she reflected, painstricken, "I ain't never t'ought I would be sorry to hear Félicie laugh."

"You t'ink he 's tough lot?" Madame Moise insisted, all eagerness.

Madame Sam's voice blazed with the fire of wounded motherhood as she answered:

"If he ain't tough lot den 't is his

face lie, and his eyes lie aussi. Dose eyes he got! Dey 's little and dey 's mean, yes. Man wit' eyes like das is going be mean wit' horse, mean wit' steer. Ma foi! I 'm sorry for anyt'ing das belong to him. When a man have mean eyes, he 's mean, yes."

And even as they passed in review the empty road and deserted byways, the mean little eyes Madame Sam berated, that had kept such sharp vigilance over the crowd, were peering and watching as though searching for more than was to be seen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE QUESTION

MONDAY morning M. Moise, mindful of the promise he had made to Reneau, threw a leg over his solid sorrel and jogged away to interview the man of whose toughness he alone entertained any doubt. The Bayou had given its opinion on Sunday evening, Madame Sam having voiced the sentiment of the majority when she said in substance to Madame Moise that the meanness of a man was measured by the meanness of his eyes. In Bienvieu a mean man is counted a "tough lot." — A man not to be bowed by mesdames; to be talked to by little children.

"But, me," M. Moise said with a sideways shake of the head, "me, I don't *know* if he is all tough lot, — or not."

Down the Bayou for a mile or more, over the bridge, then up the Bayou for another mile or more went the heavy sorrel, M. Moise musing as he rode. Once he said aloud deliberately:

"I don't know, me, if he will wish to make lane, or not."

Once he repeated the doubt with which he had set forth:

"I don't know if he is all like dey say or not." When he came to the shack the newcomer had built on the site of the American's house — long since rotted down — M. Moise tied his horse in the shade of a sapling and hailed Camusette with a genial "Bon jour."

Camusette did not say bon jour, neither did he get up from the log in front of his shack. Grimly, ungraciously, out of eyes little and round like a hog's, he eyed M. Moise in silence.

The big Monsieur came forward, sat down on the log beside his ungracious

host, pushed his hat back from his forehead and said politely:

"'T is nice place you going have here. Nice place, sho. Dis land, it has been rest so long, 't will make good crop. Good 'tater on slope and good rice aussi in bottom."

Camusette said nothing, and M. Moise sat looking away toward the thicket of pines that had sprung up, and grown tall and round in what had once been the American's chosen field.

When he had finished his thinking, the big Monsieur turned to Camusette with a lift of his finely arched brows:

"You know how 't is your land run? From Bayou on nort' to branch on sout'. Right straight line it is. You' east line run right by M. Reneau's field fence, and your west line, it follow das pasture fence; right straight across point it follow das pasture fence."

Camusette did not seem to be interested

in this information. He sat on, grim and ungracious still, not even bending a glance on the man at his side. M. Moise repeated thoughtfully:

"Right by das pasture fence, sho." He looked at Camusette with an explaining spread of his brows:

"You know how 't is. You don't have to leave lane t'rough your land if you don't wish. Das is law. But I reckon, me, you better leave lane. De sheep dey have been trav' t'rough here, 't is twenty years, maybe. I reckon you better leave lane. Better leave lane, sho."

Camusette said briefly:

"If I don't wish to leave lane, I don't leave lane, no."

"No, sir; das is law. If you don't wish to leave lane, you don't leave lane. No, sir. Mais, I reckon, maybe, you better leave lane. De sheep, dey have been trav' t'rough here twenty years. If dey don't trav' t'rough here, den day

must trav' t'rough branch. And das branch, it is bad branch for sheep. Bad branch, sho" — he turned with another explaining spread of brows and added, "in de winter."

"'T is not my sheep das trav'," Camusette told him.

"No, sir"; M. Moise agreed courteously, "'t is not your sheep." And then he began to consider the matter, and considered so long, that at last Camusette himself broke silence with a harsh:

"But 't is your sheep das trav', ha?"

M. Moise turned, his eyebrows protesting gently:

"No, sir; 't is not my sheep das trav' t'rough here. Me, I live on ot'er side of Bayou."

"Ha?" Camusette uttered suspiciously.

"Yes, sir; 't is on ot'er side of Bayou I live, down by church. I reckon you pass my place yesterday. On top of hill

wit' orange trees by front gate? Next time you pass my place, I wish you to come in and have some coffee. I have some hog dere I would like you to see. Fine hog, sho. Dey ain't white, no. Not all white. Dey have white tail — *half* dere tail is white. 'Poland China,' 't is das how dey call dem. And dey do right well on Bayou. Right well, sho. Now white hog, dey don't do right well. Dey scald," he lifted explaining brows again and added — "in de summer."

Camusette did not seem to be any more interested in hogs than he had seemed to be in lines.

M. Moise got up and settled his hat:

"I reckon," he summed up thoughtfully, "dose men das run sheep t'rough here should split you rail for make fence. Das is right. If you leave lane for dere sheep to trav' den dey should make fence for lane. Dey can all split some rails —

and me aussi, I will split some rails. Den we come all hands and put up fence. 'T will be quick job. Quick job, sho. Well, I better be going. When you come cross Bayou, you stop at my house. I will be proud, proud sho." M. Moise held out his very large hand, but Camusette stared past, refusing to see it.

"I wish to shake hands wit' you," M. Moise reminded gently. "Whenever man come to live on Bayou, me, I wish to shake hands wit' him."

Camusette got up from the log and slowly delivered his hand into the big Monsieur's hearty grasp.

"C'est bien, M. Camusette," M. Moise said heartily, "I 'm glad to meet you. Glad, sho! And Reneau, he will be proud to know you going leave lane. Proud, sho!"

Clausel Camusette withdrew his eyes from staring, and gave M. Moise such a glance as is given by a surly dog that

suffers hunger. "Reneau! You ain't hear of somebody on Bayou das come run to his house, ha?" he demanded.

"Somebody das come run to Reneau's house?" M. Moise repeated slowly. "No, sir. I ain't ever hear of anybody on Bayou das come run to his house." He met the baffled look in the little eyes and added kindly, "But if ever I hear of sombody on Bayou das come run to his house, I will send you word. Yes, sir, I will send you word, sho."

Camusette said nothing more and M. Moise tightened his cinch and untied his horse, turned, and said:

"Well, bon jour, M. Camusette! I will tell dose men how 't is and das dey must split some rails for das lane. Bon jour!"

Madame Moise was busy cooking dinner but as soon as she heard M. Moise throw his saddle on the end of the front gallery she came out at a run.

"Bien, cher," she greeted. "And you find das man at his house?"

"Yes," Monsieur told her, "I find him at his house, sho." Then he sat down and looked away peacefully to where a buzzard was circling through the blue.

"And me, I wish to know if he 's going leave das lane or not," Madame observed pointedly.

Monsieur swung his eye from the buzzard and gave her a droll side glance by way of rejoinder.

Madame rushed into merry laughter.

"But I *wish* to know," she insisted.

"And me aussi," observed Monsieur. "He did n't tell me no he won't leave lane, mais — "

"He did n't tell you no? C'est bien! If he ain't say no I reckon, me, he will leave lane. I reckon, me, maybe das Victor Reneau will stop swear so much. Oh, Amelia say he was worry!"

"Sho, sho!" said Monsieur, then he

added thoughtfully. "Seem like das man is queer chap, queer chap, sho. You know what 't is he ask me as I was go'?"

"Quoi?" demanded Madame, all interest.

"He ask me if anybody on Bayou come run to Reneau's house. Mon Dieu, I don't know for why should he ask me t'ing like das."

"He 's crazy, maybe," Madame suggested. "Or, maybe, 't is he was drunk."

"No," Monsieur said slowly, "I don't believe, me, he is crazy. And he don't look like he ever got drunk. Mais —"

But Madame wished to know more of the stranger's status.

"And what he have yonder, cher? Some sheep? Some cow? Some horse, maybe?"

Monsieur shook his head.

"He ain't got not'ing, Bébé! I don't believe, me, he 's even got dog."

"Pauvre diable!" Madame cried, and her tone softened. "I don't reckon he 's happy, cher."

M. Moise shook his head again as the dago's sour visage rose in his memory.

"Non," he said, "I don't reckon he 's happy. Mais —" his eyes went back, bothered, to the buzzard in the blue. Why should Camusette have asked him that seemingly senseless question. Why, why? Slowly, thoughtfully, Monsieur's eyes followed the buzzard as it circled and hung and circled again. Madame had long ago gone back to her kitchen, the gumbo was almost done; the bird was sinking to rest awhile, when Monsieur brought his chair down on all fours with a sharply uttered: —

"Mon Dieu!" His big, hairy hand clinched on his knee and M. Moise stared at it. His thought took shape slowly.

"And he t'ink he can come sneak on das little girl's track like dog? He t'ink

he can do like das on Bayou? But, me, I don't know if he can do like das." Staring hard at his hand, M. Moise could yet see no reason why the dago should have expected Marie Micou to run to Reneau's house, but he saw very clearly why the dago had come to the Bayou — an evil mission. Monsieur's jaws gripped as he thought of it. "Mais," he said grimly, "I don't know if he can do like das. Not if I live, he can't," Monsieur concluded. Then he tipped his chair back to ponder yet another thing:

Should he tell Bébé?

M. Moise was not a man who told things unless they had to be told. Should he tell Bébé?

Madame had been having a caller in the kitchen and hearing news. She came to the door and broke upon Monsieur's pondering with a merry laugh.

"Voilà, cher! You ain't hear what 't is happen at school — last Friday?"

Monsieur smiled at the laughter, and shook his head.

"Ma foi. But das Aluin we got play big man, yes. He was wish to have fight wit' Hérbert Paul. Aluin don't tell me not'ing, no! and our little girls, dey don't say not'ing. But Camille just now send her little Espérance to borrow some sugar and she tell. She 's sharp, das Espérance. And she laugh! Say her Uncle Aluin was ready for lick Hérbert when L'Autre get scare and tell. 'T was like dis," and Madame got both hands ready and began to tell it busily. "You know das rule teacher make — about drop book on floor? Bien! Hérbert's book fall on floor. He don't see it, no. Not Hérbert. But das little L'Un, he see, and he say quick, 'Marie Micou drop book on floor.' Voilà! Aluin jump up, ''T is not Marie Micou drop book. L'Un tells lie.' Hérbert jump up: — 'L'Un don't tell lie, no!' Den

Aluin say, mighty big, 'If any man wants fight he can come to me and get all he wants.' And he take step to Hérbert but little L'Autre gets scared and holler, 'Gar, Hérbert's book on floor, Gar!' Oh, she say L'Un was mad wit' L'Autre for tell. And Hérbert was mad wit' L'Un for lie. But she say de only one das *cry* was Marie Micou! And, cher, das Espérance! She say she don't know for why Marie wish to cry. Say if ever boy wish to fight for her, she ain't going wish to cry. Say das make her proud, yes. Ma foi, das Espérance!"

M. Moise smiled again in sympathy, and then said slowly:

"And Aluin, he take up for Marie Micou."

"Yes! Oh, Espérance say he look proud. Say he set his arm — comme-ça; and t'row up his head — 'If L'Un say 't is Marie drop book on floor, he lie.'"

"And L'Un," Monsieur commented gravely, "he lie. I 'm sorry for das. Sorry, sho!"

"And me aussi. I 'm sorry for Hérbert. Oh, Espérance say he was unhappy. Say he was *shame*. She say Josephine ask teacher if she could speak, and went on boy's side and talked wit' Hérbert. Says seem like Josephine was beg Hérbert not to lick L'Un because 't was for him das L'Un tell lie. But she say Hérbert lick L'Un soon as school was out. Ma foi! Das little chap he 's so bad! He should have had licking long time ago."

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur, and considered it.

"If he tell lie, Bébé, he ought to have licking. But, me, I ain't ever hear das he tell lie before."

"No," Madame admitted busily, "he ain't ever tell *lie* before. But look what he do! Das time he send das poor Va-

lère Dupré to ask Félicie to marry wit' him. Oh, cher! das little chap should have had licking for das!"

"Mais," Monsieur objected gently, "I don't know if it was him das send Valère or not. Valère tell me he go tell Félicie, he wish to pet hair on her head and das she cry and say she was sorry. He say he tell her den he won't pet hair if it make her sorry, and he say she cry some more, and say she was sorry some more. Valère tell me he don't know what to do den, so he say, 'Doggone, you do just like one fool.'"

Madame caught a breath of quick compassion:

"Poor Valère, 't is what he say all time when he don't know what to say." And then she broke into laughter.

"Mais, cher, why you ain't never tell me das!"

"'T is not right to laugh at him, Bébé," Monsieur reminded gently.

"No, I know, me, 't is not right. Pauvre garçon. I wish to know, me, what 't is he 's going do."

M. Moise answered deliberately:

"He say he ain't never going to ask Félicie to let him pet hair wit' her again. Say he was scared when she cried. But, Bébé, I don't know if it was L'Un das send him to do like das. Valère don't tell me L'Un send him."

"'T was L'Un das tell Josephine das Valère was going to make marry wit' Félicie, and das she was going have man das have no head for frère. Josephine tell me she *believe* 't was L'Un make Valère t'ink about das. She tell me he just laid down on ground and laugh when he was telling her." And Madame's merriment bubbled over again.

"Oh, cher, Josephine ain't never going forget das time L'Un make her go dive in Bayou."

Monsieur forgot his gravity and let slip a chuckle:

"Das L'Un, he 's live chap. Live chap, sho."

Madame laughed also with relish. Josephine Santerre was the most serene girl on the Bayou, and when L'Un had put a plank, slick with slime, under the water where Josephine went to get her scrubbing sand, all Bienvieu had held the side even while it shook the head. — Josephine had stepped on the slick plank and shot off into mid-stream, and her manner of doing it had not been at all serene.

Madame Moise had cherished but one regret concerning the episode, and she voiced it now for the hundredth time, saying:

"I wish, me, I had seen Josephine when she go dive in!"

Monsieur had, however, gone back to the considering of Valère.

"I reckon, me, he ain't never going to have head — das Valère," he summed up slowly.

"Oh, mais non!" Madame assured him. "His papa tell me 't is because he have so much troub' wit' his legs das he can't do not'ing. But me, I t'ink 't is not just his leg das he have troub' wit' so much."

"Maybe if he ain't never had dose rickets — " M. Moise began, but Madame interrupted with a sorrowful appeal:

"Oh, cher! Ain't his mamma and his papa cousin? Ain't dere mamma and dere papa cousin? Ain't dere mamma and dere papa cousin? Ma foi! I wish to know, me, how boy *can* have head when he is so much cousin wit' his own papa!"

"Sho, sho!" Monsieur said. "Mais, I reckon, me, if he ain't had dose rickets he could walk better dan he do, maybe."

"Pauvre garçon. He could n't walk any worse dan he do," Madame agreed. "Not if he going walk 't all, he can't," she added softly. The little Madame had a very tender heart for August Dupré's motherless, half-witted son.

And there came then to Monsieur and Madame Moise the silence that always came when they had spoken of Valère Dupré. Poor fellow! it was not his fault that he was a fool, and Monsieur and Madame knew it well. There was something appealingly pathetic in his uncomplaining, unconscious paying of that penalty of his forefathers' folly.

Madame Moise sighed.

"Maybe if his mother ain't die when he was baby he ain't been sick so much. But I don't believe, me, he ever could have head."

"Sho, sho!" said Monsieur, and then he added as earnestly and as sincerely

as though he had not already said it dozens of times:

"I reckon, me, dere was too much cousin. Too much cousin, sho."

"Cher," Madame told him, turning with the sudden recollection, "dey say das Marie Micou, she is good to Valère. But, yes! Dey say she is *kind* to him."

"Mais oui?" Monsieur said, pleased. "I reckon, me, das Marie have kind heart, maybe."

"Mais oui, she have kind heart. All time look like she wish to do some*t'ing* for some*body*. Mais, cher, 't is funny how she come! Teacher say she t'ink maybe Marie come from New Orleans. Say she read in paper how dey have yellow fever in New Orleans. And she say de people was run here, run dere. And M. Santerre, he say he read das in paper aussi. What you t'ink, cher?"

M. Moise considered it.

"I hear dey have fever in New Orleans

— good while ago, I hear das. But I don't know if 't is so or not. Dose papers, dey lie heap, yes!"

"Oh, mais oui, dey lie heap," Madame admitted without hesitancy. "But maybe 't is dey don't lie dis time. Maybe 't is dere Marie was raised. Wherever 't is she was raised, 't is where dey talk de French."

Monsieur thought of the dago — of his queer question and the perplexity: Why to Reneau's house? but he only shook his head and set up the ends of his mustache in doubt.

"Mais, Bébé, in das New Orleans, dey don't talk de French like we talk — "

Madame broke in eagerly:

"Mais oui! And das Marie, she don't talk de French like we talk. Not all time, she don't. Sara tell me sometime she say de word and dey don't know what 't is she say. I reckon, maybe, 't is from New Orleans she come."

Monsieur nodded slowly. His live little Madame had been over this question a good many times without seeming to make any more of it by persistent hammering. But farther possibility now presented itself to her and she said with alarm:

"Maybe 't is back to New Orleans she will go in de winter. Oh, I pray God, me, she don't go till she have bought stove for Sara!"

CHAPTER NINE

THE SHADOW ON THE BAYOU

Because of the eagerness with which Bayou Bienvieu had seized upon the vital question, whether Clausel Camusette was all tough or not, Marie Micou had escaped criticism for failing to attend mass on the fourth Sunday. A few mesdames had mentioned the matter with raised brows to Madame Sam, but her explanation that it was a matter of dress had quickly silenced the voices and lowered the brows. Even M. Santerre had conceded it with a kind-hearted: "Certainly, certainly, sho!"

When, however, Marie ventured upon a farther step in the path she had planned to walk alone, she met with opposition. It was on Monday morning, just after breakfast, that Marie with down-dropped

lashes, meekly announced that she was not going to school. The moment selected for the announcement proved unfortunate, for the "scholard" had not left the kitchen. Unmindful of the waiting work, he sat down and called Marie gently to stand before him. His dark eyes were very grave.

"I wish to know why 't is you don't want to go to school, maybe. If 't is das teacher ain't been kind wit' you?"

Marie could not truthfully say that the teacher had ever been anything but very kind to her, so she looked down at her hands and said nothing.

"If 't is somebody been tease you, maybe?"

But, no! Tingling with the memory of the marked deference that had been shown her all Friday afternoon — after Aluin Moise had stood forth to defend her, Marie could not say that she feared the mocking of her mates.

The scholarly inquiry, gentle and persistent as dropping water, continued:

"Den why 't is you wish to stay home, Marie?"

Marie lifted her head and lied gallantly.

"I wish to stay home for make mouchoir, me," she said.

At this the scholar's dark eyes grew graver.

"Mais non!" he said, shocked. "To learn, 't is better dan to make de money. All time, 't is better. Voilà, Marie. What a man have in his pocket, he can lose, maybe. But what he have in his head, he can't lose. No! And what a man have in his pocket he spend and 't is gone. But what a man have in his head, de more he spend, de more he have. Dere ain't any money in pocket, Marie, so fine like learning in head. Non! And dere ain't any money in world can buy learning in head. If you make mouchoir,

and make mouchoir, till you be rich like dose mesdames on Black Bayou, you can't buy learning in head, no! 'T is only in school das you can get learning in head. And so me, I wish das you go to school every day and learn like Josephine and Félicie learn. Learn to write nice and to know what 't is you write. Some children go to school and learn to write nice but dey don't know what 't is dey write. No. Dey can write just like de copy, but dey don't know what 't is dey write. Now me, I don't wish das you learn to write like das. If you don't know what word is, ask teacher. Certainly, certainly, sho! And 't is same when you read. If you come to word in book and don't know what das word mean, ask teacher. All time, ask teacher! Teacher will tell you, I know das, me, because when first she come I go to schoolhouse and I say to her:

"'If you please, Miss May, you will

tell my children what word mean if dey don't know?'

"And she tell me mais oui, certainly, das make her proud.

"And aussi, I wish, Marie, das you learn to calculate. I wish das you learn dose multeepleecation tables. I wish das you learn dem so fast das you can answer quick. Not just to say straight down line, but to skip here, skip dere. Voilà, my boy Bat! He learn like das when he go to school and now das he have store — mais oui, he have right nice little store down dere! — and when somebody come in store and ask him somet'ing, like, 'How much 't is for seven yards of clot' at five cents de yard?' Bat don't have to go get piece of paper and put down marks. No! He tell dem quick, 'T'irty-five cents!' Just like das! Mais oui, 't is one day last week I was in store and hear him do das. And why he can do like das? Voici, he know his multeeplee-

cation table. 'T is fine t'ing, das multeepleecation table. Fine t'ing, sho. Me, I would rat'er my children know das multeepleecation table dan have all money dere is in world. Certainly, certainly, sho! You see how 't is, Marie. Man can lose money, lose all he 's got, and be poor as when he was born; but if he learn das multeepleecation table *right* he can't lose it, no! Not until he lose his head."

Eh bien, Marie Micou went to school to learn to read what she wrote, to understand what she read, to commit the multiplication tables, and in her loneliness, in the shadow of that following fear, to resist as best she could the wooing of Aluin Moise. The last was not easy to do, for the more she avoided the big fellow, the more he delighted to seek her, and the more determined became his attentions. The honest Aluin was as open and above board about it as

about everything else; a course which, coupled with the many and unmerciful snubbings he received, would have brought down upon him the merriment of the school, had not his easy temper and native courage been proof against chagrin, and refused admission of defeat. As it was, the school looked on, eager-eyed, intensely interested.

Coquetry was a pretty game not infrequently played in the Bienvieu school, but it had never been played there so daringly before; and though all the girls envied Marie's skill and dash, L'Un very nearly voiced the secret sentiment of the boys when he said to Hérbert as he trudged manfully beside that big brother on the way home from school:

"I wish to know, me, why 't is das Marie Micou don't put rose in hair when Aluin give it her? Godamit, if I have girl and she don't put rose in

hair when I give it her, me, I take das rose and t'row it in her face, yes!"

Little L'Autre looked up, made brave by a brilliant thought.

"Maybe," he began, and hesitated. He well knew that he was not nearly so well informed as L'Un touching the nature of love affairs, and his sense of ignorance oppressed him. "Maybe 't is Marie don't wish to be girl wit' Aluin."

"Don't wish," L'Un shouted derisively, and even Hérbert stopped in his stride to stare at the little chap.

"Who 't is you reckon Marie wish to be girl wit'?" he asked trying hard not to echo L'Un's derision.

L'Autre took heart at the question:

"I t'ink, me, she wish to be girl wit' Valère Dupré."

"Oh, Godamit!" L'Un shouted, and flung his books away that he might roll laughing in the grass. "Girl wit' Valère Dupré! Oh, Godamit! L'Autre, tu

sot! You don't know dere ain't girl on Bayou would wish to be girl wit' Valère Dupré?"

But little L'Autre, despite the tears of chagrin that he had to keep blinking back, had plucky stuff in him. In the face of even Hérbert's grin he backed up his statement:

"Dere ain't boy in school Marie is so kind wit' like she is wit' Valère. When Valère give her rose she put it in hair. Oui!"

"Oui?" L'Un repeated and sat up, soberly, in the grass. "Valère ain't never give Marie rose," he asserted, but doubtfully.

"Mais oui," L'Autre declared stoutly. "Marie was sew' on gallery and Valère fetch rose, and t'row it on floor by her foot, and Marie pick up rose and put it in her hair. Mais oui. I see her do like das. Mamma have send me to take back egg she borrow," and L'Autre

stuck out his chest with an air, for L'Un's face plainly showed defeat.

Hérbert interposed a quick question:

"When das was, L'Autre? Since last Friday, ha?"

L'Autre answered proudly:

"Mais oui. 'T was yesterday I see das, me!"

Hérbert walked on thoughtfully for a while, then he spoke to the twins, addressing them as one — as he usually did.

"Don't you say not'ing 'bout das to nobody," he commanded.

L'Un, alert again as a dog at a fair, gave manly assent, but L'Autre hesitated. Finders should be keepers.

"Not mamma?" he questioned wistfully. "I can't tell mamma?"

Eh bien, it was Hérbert's turn to hesitate. Mamma was all right, — true and tried and sharp as a sharp ax. Also, she was a woman of good judgment.

She would never tell to a neighbor what ought not to be told. But in the strength of her many virtues mamma had a fatal weakness — in Hérbert's eyes. She believed that she should tell her husband all she knew. And if ever there was an unreliable Monsieur on Bienvieu it was M. Paul. Confide to him the simplest story and he would tell it to every man he met — tell it seven ways for Sunday, and never tell it straight. And Hérbert knew it; knew that his father was a temperate, kind-hearted little man, and a liar. That as long as M. Paul could wag a tongue he would talk a stream of wild words, heedless alike of what he said, or to whom he said it. If L'Autre should tell mamma, mamma would tell papa, and papa, likely as not, would trot straight to M. Moise with a crazy account of Aluin's attentions to Marie Micou, and of Marie's favor, in preference, for Va-

lère, — a wild yarn that would hurt the big Monsieur and go all down the Bayou to Aluin's most outrageous shame. It is bad enough for a boy to be cut out by a fair rival, but to be cut out by a boy that has no head! It was intolerable, Hérbert felt, that such a story should be started about his friend. And yet, to tell the little chaps to keep a secret from mamma — he could not do that.

"'T is me will tell mamma. I will tell her das it is you see rose, and see Marie put it in hair. I will tell her 't is *you*, L'Autre, but I don't wish das you talk about Aluin and Marie Micou. I have been friends wit' Aluin since he was baby, and," Hérbert added earnestly, "'t will make me mad if you tell somet'ing on him. I would fight any man on Bayou das tell t'ing on him."

Under pressure of this warning the

little chaps swore their tongues to stillness and Hérbert went to keep his promise of telling mamma.

Madame Paul, very thin and very busy, was in her garden hoeing beans, when her tall son stopped at her side and took the tool from her hands:

"Mamma, if I tell you somet'ing you won't tell nobody, no?"

"Mais non," Madame Paul agreed readily, but it never for a moment occurred to her that Hérbert included M. Paul in his category. In Madame Paul's thinking Monsieur and Madame were one.

"You won't tell nobody," Hérbert insisted. "Nobody 't all."

"Mais non. Je le jure! 'T is about Josephine?"

"No. She 's all right, Josephine is." Hérbert's face softened as he spoke his girl's name, but it grew stern again at once and he said:

"You won't tell nobody? 'T is about Aluin Moise and Marie Micou."

"Quoi!" uttered Madame, looking keenly into her son's eyes. "'T is das," she said softly. "Aluin is go wit' *her?*"

Hérbert nodded. To him the terrible part of the story was yet to be told, — that a fool was preferred before his friend. When Madame, horrified, repeated her question with an incredulous:

"Das can't be so!"

Hérbert replied almost impatiently:

"Oh, mais oui, 't is so! All time he bring her rose; he bring her pencil."

"And what Marie do?" Madame asked anxiously.

"Not'ing. She won't wear rose in hair."

"Ha? And den he bring her some *more* rose, maybe. Oh, Mot'er in Heaven," she burst out unhappily, "I don't know for why Aluin wish to be fool like das!"

"He ain't fool," Hérbert defended promptly. "Besides Josephine, I ain't never see girl so pretty like das Marie."

"Mais, Hérbert," Madame wailed to his stupidity. "I don't know, me, what 't is Madame Moise will do if das boy go make marry wit' *stranger*. Even if 't is she is pretty and nice and so kind like she is. From where she come? For why she come? Nobody don't know!"

Hérbert scraped the hoe thoughtfully through the loose dirt. This was a view of the case he had not taken.

"C'est vrai," he admitted. "She ain't like ot'er girls is. She ain't like Josephine 't all."

"No," his mother agreed softly. Then she smiled in tender teasing out of her trouble. "Mais, mon fils, dere ain't any girl so fine like Josephine is."

Hérbert laughed boyishly and began to hoe the beans with strong, swift

strokes. His mother moved beside him down the row:

"Madame Moise t'ought 't would be Félicie," she said, returning sorrowfully to her friend's cause for sorrow, "and she was proud for Félicie. Proud, yes. Ah, Heaven! I am sorry for Madame Moise."

"And me, I am sorry for Monsieur," Hérbert said soberly. He was beginning to see how it was.

"And me aussi," his mother agreed. "Oh, I am sorry for dem when dey hear."

This recalled Hérbert to his uneasiness touching papa. He said earnestly:

"I reckon dey ain't going hear —"

"Dey ain't hear last Sunday," his mother put in with conviction. "Oh, Madame Moise was *glad* last Sunday. She was laugh. She was tell me what 't is Madame Sam say about das new man — das Camusette, like dey call him.

She tell me Madame Sam say she t'ink das man is mean because he have de little eye. And Madame Moise was laugh'. She say, 'Voilà! Sara t'ink every man in world should have de big eye because her old man have eyes like cups wit'out bottom.' Oh, she was *glad* last Sunday!"

Hérbert stopped hoeing:

"You reckon Madame Sam know?" he asked.

But instead of answering him, Madame Paul turned with a pleased:

"Dere my old man is!"

Hérbert, his anxieties heavy upon him, turned also, with warning, but it was too late. Down the path, barefooted, with his hat very much on one side, came M. Paul stepping along toward them with high, stylish steps. One-lunged, lean, and a liar, there was yet no malice in M. Paul's make up. Kind he was to all living things, and kind he

always wished to be. He beamed upon his boy now with overflowing approval, and cried to him before he reached him:

"Ha, Hérbert! And you are helping your mamma wit' garden again? C'est bon. Dere ain't boy on Bayou so quick to help his mamma like you is. 'T is just now I was tell das to M. Moise. I say to him: 'Voilà! when some boy get 'gaged to make marry wit' girl, seem like he forgets he 's got mamma. But not my Hérbert. No! More he gets 'gaged, more he help his mamma.' I tell him, me, aussi, when boy begins to grow man seem like all he t'ink is to chop de log; to haul de log; to burn de coal; to make de money. But not my Hérbert, no! He ain't never in so much hurry to make de money, das he can't stop to hoe garden for his mamma, to cut de wood for his mamma, maybe." M. Paul had reached them out of breath,

and Hérbert with dropped head, hot and unhappy, was hoeing furiously.

Madame Paul took up the pause:

"You been talk' wit' M. Moise, cher?" she questioned.

"Mais oui," the small man said largely. "I stopped for have little talk wit' Moise." M. Paul called every Monsieur on the Bayou familiarly by his name, and a doubt as to whether they liked it or not never occurred to him. M. Moise accepted the indignity with his good-natured chuckle, but Victor Reneau, the sheep magnate, spirited and impatient, hotly resented it. Not that his resentment availed. Behind his back the magnate might call Paul a liar, and before his face snub him harshly, but all he could do would not prevent M. Paul from addressing him kindly as Victor, and alluding to him always as Reneau.

Madame Paul accepted the statement as all right and asked anxiously:

"And M. Moise, he seem like he was glad, maybe?"

"Oh! mais oui, he was glad, Moise was. He was smil'. He tell me he hear his boy and my boy 'most have fight in school one day not long ago," and M. Paul turned with pleased pride to his eldest born.

"Ha, Hérbert! How das was? You t'ink you can lick big chap like Aluin? C'est bien! I don't wish any boy of mine ever be 'fraid for fight. Me, I ain't got much leg, and I ain't got much arm neit'er. But if any man on Bayou want fight, I 'm glad to give him all I got." He smiled complacently at this modest mention of his courage, and asked of Hérbert:

"Mais I t'ought you and Aluin was such big friends. For what you wish to lick him, ha?"

Hérbert tossed the question aside.

"'T was not'ing," he said.

Madame's motherly pride flew to the front.

"Mais oui, 't was somet'ing," she cried, and in a glow told the story as she had heard it from Josephine Santerre.

M. Paul heard her through, his feet fidgeting excitedly in the loose earth.

"And 't was for das Marie Aluin wish to fight?" he cried in grief. "Mon Dieu, Moise ain't hear das, I reckon. He would n't be smil' so much if he had hear das. I wish to know if he is just play, or if he is going choose —"

Madame broke in unhappily:

"Cher, he 's done choose. All time he bring her rose for put in hair, and he bring her pencil. He bring her *lead* pencil, cher."

M. Paul saw the seriousness of that, and his face showed it.

"He bring her pencil," he repeated slowly. "Mon Dieu, he bring her pen-

cil, and she 's — stranger. Me, I wish to know what Moise will do?"

"And me," Madame cried to him, "I wish to know what Madame Moise will do. Ah, she was glad Sunday. She was laugh'!"

Hérbert seized upon his chance and said earnestly:

"I reckon, me, better not say not'ing. Maybe 't is Aluin is just play wit' her."

"If it was just rose he bring her," Madame said and flung out her hands.

M. Paul agreed to it, shaking his head sagely.

"No, sir; not if he give her pencil, he ain't play."

Hérbert said, then, pointedly:

"I hope, me, dere ain't any man on Bayou so mean as to talk wit' M. Moise about das."

M. Paul shook his head sagely again:

"I don't reckon dere 's any man on

Bayou so mean as want to hurt Moise. He 's good man, Moise is. But he 's going have to hear. 'T will be friend das tell him tout-de-suite — "

Hérbert interrupted hastily:

" But it ain't you das going tell him, ha, papa? "

" Me? " repeated M. Paul. " I ain't only friend Moise have. Dere 's Victor, dere 's Sam, dere 's Jean Champetre. Dey all have tongue in head. Mais moi, if I see friend have measles and he don't know and start to go in rain, I don't tell him: ' Go on! Rain can't hurt you! Dere ain't man on Bayou so well like you.' Mais non, I don't tell him das. I say to him: ' Arretez! 'T is sick man you be. Va à le lit! ' "

" Sot! " Hérbert gnashed silently at his own blabbing. " Why you don't make hurry now and tell all about Valère aussi? "

Madame Paul was saying:

"'T is Aluin himself should tell his papa, and I reckon, me, he will tell him and his mamma aussi. Oh, I am sorry for dem."

"Et moi," M. Paul said sincerely.

Hérbert sighed unhappily.

The meager Monsieur, the overworked Madame, the troubled boy, were one and all of them sorry to the soul for the big Monsieur and his little Madame. They stood together in the falling light. The garden lay about them in its tidy rows; the yellow glow shone over; the night-hawk called.

CHAPTER TEN

THE MAN WHO HAD NO HEAD

WHEN Valère Dupré went to school, his father had explained to the teacher how it was:

"You see, Miss May, my boy's legs, dey 's always been bad. Bad, sho! His mot'er die when he was baby, and seem like he ain't never been right hearty. His legs keep give out. And I know, me, he can't learn much wit' legs like das — can't learn much in book, no. He is smart in house, smart, sho! Dere ain't not'ing he can't do. Oh, he is smart in house, das Valère. And in garden aussi. He dig, he chop — He 's smart chap, sho!"

The teacher said: "He has very bright eyes."

"Bright eyes, sho," Dupré agreed eagerly. "Bright eyes, yes ma'am! Me, I ain't never see boy have eyes so bright like Valère have."

"Nor I," said the teacher. She had seen many monkeys with eyes bright like Valère's but she did not say so to M. Dupré.

"Bright eyes," repeated the father, pleased and proud. "Me, I ain't t'ought you would see das so quick. And so you will un'stand, Miss May? If he don't learn much you will be easy on him, if you please? You will know how 't is — wit' his legs?"

"Certainly," said the teacher. "I will remember. It is too bad he should have that trouble with his legs, is n't it?"

"It is, yes, m'am. It is, sho! Mais, man can't have *everyt'ing*."

"That is true," Miss May assented, and returning M. Dupré's parting bow, her glance went over pitifully to Valère,

who had so little, — so little in the way of brow or upper lip; so little, poor fellow, of human intelligence in his face.

But Valère did not know. Proud and happy with his primer he came to school every day, and said his abc's over and over, and never learned them, nor ever felt the bitterness nor the folly of his failure. When the teacher called his name, Valère would arise proudly and come grotesquely wobbling and lurching on his rickets-twisted legs, to her table. At other times he sat in his seat, a model of quietude, making marks on his slate like those teacher had made there, watching the goats through a knot hole in the wall opposite, or softly cracking his knuckles under the desk. And never a boy in school so pleased and happy as Valère! Whenever another boy made a bad break or fell from grace, Valère was always ready for him at recess with a mild reproof, saying:

"Doggone! You do just like one fool."

His stock remark had served him many a faithful turn.

Valère had this also to his credit. Teacher never had to tell him to face his desk. He never twisted his head round to look over to the girls' side as the other boys did. No! Valère did not look at the girls. It is true that a year or so ago, his eyes had been dazzled by the sunbright glory of Félicie's hair, and that, advised by L'Un, he had fared to her wash-bench one blue Monday, and begged permission to pet that glad-colored hair. Félicie had cried and said she was sorry, and Valère, scared and puzzled, had done what all men on the Bayou, wise or foolish, did in time of trouble, — gone to M. Moise.

The big Monsieur had explained gently that a girl could not let two boys pet her hair, and Valère had laid this

decision before L'Un, when the little imp began to question him concerning the success of his venture.

L'Un lifted his thin shoulders in a shrug of derision:

"Ha, I reckon M. Moise t'ink Félicie is for Aluin, but, me, I know who Félicie Santerre is for."

This subtle insinuation of the eight-year-old's own intentions was lost upon Valère, but he got the notion that Félicie was for Aluin, and so he never looked across to the girls' side of the schoolroom again. If Félicie was for Aluin, she was not for him. Even though Valère had no head, he could understand that.

And so, freed from temptation, pleased and happy, Valère's school days had passed peacefully until there came that hot August day when the teacher had brought the little stranger girl into the school, and the little girl had begun to

cry, and gone on crying. The sound of the sobbing had filled Valère with trepidation. Badly frightened he sat in his seat, forgetful of his knot hole, forgetful of the sweet solace of knuckle-cracking, until the teacher called his name, and then he stood up worse scared than ever, because to reach the teacher's desk, he had to pass right in front of the crying girl.

Eh bien! Valère, in his fright, had made such an awkward job of that passage that just as he came opposite Marie he had dropped his precious primer at her feet. Marie, startled, had looked up. Straight into Valère's eyes went her appealing glance, wet, sweet, scared. The glance had made Valère a brave man. He stooped boldly to recover his primer and said kindly to Marie:

"Doggone, you do just like one fool!"

Valère had struggled on to the teach-

er's desk and said his abc's; but he had learned something even finer than the alphabet that day, something, too, that he would not forget. He had learned how to make Marie Micou look up, and look straight into his eyes. C'est vrai, not even for the sake of that sweet, straight glance would Valère willingly throw his primer on the floor again, but there were other things that could be thrown at Marie's feet — dead bugs, and queer worms, and flowers. But yes, flowers! The woods were full of them, all kinds and colors. So was the Dupré garden, and Marie learned about them all. As she came along the road to school, as she sat sewing on the Santerre gallery, or swept the yard, or worked in the garden, she would be startled into a swift raising of the eyes by a gift from Valère that was flung at her feet.

In her loneliness and loyalty, Marie

picked up the flowers that fell; but she did not wear any of them, until one morning, as she and Félicie trudged to school, she stooped to take a rosebud from the dust, and Félicie commented upon her action, saying with a touch of reproof:

"'T was Valère t'row it."

"Das what I know," Marie made answer.

Félicie looked troubled.

"Mais," she objected, "you can't take flower from Valère."

"Pourquoi?" Marie inquired.

"Pourquoi?" Félicie repeated, and then the admission it hurt so to make came cutting its way from the secret places of her girl's heart to her plucky lips:

"'T is Aluin das wish to fetch flower for you."

"But, me," Marie explained, and her hand tightened on the bail of their din-

ner bucket, "but, me, I don't wish das he fetch flowers."

"Mais, Marie," Félicie cried, "'t is for Aluin to say for who he shall fetch flowers!"

Marie bravely shrugged her slender shoulders.

"Maybe! But 't is for me to say for who I will wear de flower. And, me, I will wear de flower for Valère. Voilà!" And before Félicie could prevent her, she thrust the dusty rosebud into her hair and marched into school, wearing it.

Eh bien! The first time Valère had seen Marie pick up one of his flowers he had gone away on his wobbly legs farther and farther until he came to the edge of a swamp where owls slept the day away, and dead leaves were ever rotting. There was a place in the swamp deeply shaded by grass that grew tall around a decaying log, and there Valère

went to lie face upward, on the side nearest the swamp. God knows why! But it was there he always went whenever he was shaken, and there he lay in hiding until the stirring pulses that had scared him beat down again to the dumb beast's throb and halt. When all was still within him, Valère would go wobbling back again to his place among the people on the Bayou. And not even L'Un could make him tell where he had gone or why he went.

But the day that Marie came into school with his dusty rose in her hair, — that day Valère did not run away to his log in the swamp. No! Very still he sat in his seat, smiling to feel how hard his heart hammered him, — and heaven knew what things he thought; but after dismissal, when the school was crowding out on the playground, Valère struggled through the throng to Marie's side and, having managed to bring himself to a

stand before her, stood up straight, though unsteadily, and said to her gravely, proudly:

"Dere ain't man on Bayou can make fire under pot so fine like me. 'T is my *papa* say das!"

Marie, abashed by this unexpected opening, looked up and looked away — into Aluin's watching eyes.

Aluin smiled reassuringly, and came at once to Valère's elbow, saying blithely:

"Voilà, Valère! What 't is you talk to my girl?"

Marie turned quickly and ran to join Félicie. Aluin smiled and walked away slowly. But Valère stood still in the sunshine, all the pride of his bearing bending beneath a great load of trouble. Fear? Anxiety? What it was that bent him Valère did not know. Only that it hurt him, — hurt him until it drove him to seek for solace. Not to the swamp,

nor to his father's house. The Moise place was a mile away, a weary, weary mile for his wretched legs; but it was thither that Valère's hurt would have him go. And there he went.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NO ANSWER

Marie Micou's days were becoming difficult, but they were not her only difficult times. There were nights, dark nights, when she lay beside Félicie and with her black eyes open upon the darkness saw all that it had to show her; seeing, sometimes, stars that hung forever in their lonesome places; seeing, sometimes, a moonbeam that gleamed upon a threatening stick, — a moonbeam that for all it shone upon a summer night, looked cold and cruel, and cast an ugly shadow at her feet, a shadow the more hideous in that it cut her off forever from the only refuge she knew. At the sight of that shadow Marie would hear again the rip and rasp of an angry old voice, accusing, convicting. How the owner of

that voice had danced in his fury, and his shadow, — how it had danced also, as he called her thief and meutriere, and swore that her hands were dirty with the blood that had been shed because of her wrongdoing. Marie would feel again the beat of his hot breath as he caught at her, crying that she should hang by the neck, and then her thoughts would flee and flee away from the threat of voice and hand — from her accusing conscience. Yet when her thoughts had made an end of their fleeing it was in a glow not unlike exaltation that she would slip out to the well and wash her hands. Her hands were clean once more, and she would keep them clean. Mary in Heaven would help her. Then, praying, Marie would see it all again, — the temptation, — the island lapped by blue water, and the willows that wound round it; the fields of cowpeas and tobacco. Seeing, also, a pirogue

that, driven by conscious guilt and the terror born of it, shot swiftly across the blue water only to be turned over and adrift as it touched the river's farther shore.

Seeing all that the darkness had to show her, Marie looked and shrank not, for Madame Sam's good fish soups had told upon her nerves. She would not have cried now if they had asked her, these kindly ones, whence she came and why? Not that she could have told them, for already she had made her resolve:

"All time I will watch. If I see das old man come, I will jump, I will run. Mais I don't tell nobody not'ing till I have buy stove for Madame Sam."

But Bienvieu had ceased to question concerning Marie Micou. Voilà, all Bienvieu was splitting rails, — the lean M. Paul, the red-headed Jean Champetre, the big Monsieur, the muscular M. Reneau. All splitting rails for the

lane that was to be made through the land now called Camusette's. Aluin also — smiling to himself while he worked.

"When de boys begin to t'row sticks at de persimmon trees, den will I have talk wit' Mademoiselle Marie," he promised himself once again, as maul and wedge did their beautiful work under his strong, skilled hands. Not a man on the Bayou could split a straighter or a cleaner rail than Aluin.

Eh bien, the scholar was splitting rails too, bending his bowed old back to the task, glad to help a neighbor, laboring willingly in the hot September weather. When M. Reneau heard about it he slapped a saddle on his most impatient pony and went at a run to tell M. Moise.

"Damné, Moise," he said, and shoved back his hat to wipe at the sweat, "Sam Santerre 's going split some rails for das fence."

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur. He rested on his maul and looked away thoughtfully through the thickening woods. "Eh bien, Victor, I reckon Sam t'inks he like to split some, maybe."

"But look how he split!" the magnate burst forth in exasperation. "One end big like post; one end little like picket. When he make fence — he don't make not'ing but holes, no!"

"Holes, sho," said M. Moise, and began to consider it. The magnate's impatience could not await a decision. He said pointedly:

"My God! I wish to know what das Camusette will t'ink when he see dose rails. I reckon, me, he will t'ink dere ain't man on Bayou can split rail fit for fence."

"Sho, sho," Monsieur soothed. Then he added kindly:

"Sam always wish to do his share same like l'autres."

"But he always go make mess," the magnate protested hotly. "Damné, 't is his share das spoil job. I t'ink, me, better tell him not to split."

M. Moise lifted his maul and set it down with emphasis, then he said courteously:

"If Sam wish to split, he will split. Dose big ends, dey is fine for go in ground. Fine, sho. Me," M. Moise explained deliberately, "I always wish to have big end for go in ground, and little end for go in air."

The magnate understood. Sam Santerre's crooked rails would be the stakes that stayed that fence. Though he, M. Victor Reneau, should rave, he could not change the position M. Moise had taken.

"'T will spoil job," he predicted irately.

"Sho, sho," the big Monsieur sympathized gently.

So it happened that when the day for

building the fence had come and the road was full of ponies and teams trotting and creaking toward the American's long-deserted farm, there was the scholar at the end of the line with his load of crooked rails, ready and willing to do his share of fence building. He was an old man, the oldest on the Bayou, — very tall, very bowed, but always at work, working with an unflinching industry, working all the harder in that he generally did things wrong.

And the scholar worked hard at the fencing of that lane, — so hard that roars of laughter burst irresponsibly from the younger men, and so ineffectually that many an impatient " damné " was smothered by M. Reneau.

M. Camusette did not work. Grim and non-communicative, he stood looking on, listening, perhaps, but taking no part in the rollicking interchange of laughter and jest and swear that made

such merry sport of that hard afternoon's work. Not a word did M. Camusette have to say to anyone until the last stake was set, the last rider laid in, and the men began to tighten cinches and swing to saddle. Then Camusette drew slowly nearer to M. Moise and said almost civilly:

"Das nice horse you got."

M. Moise, who was in the act of mounting, took his foot from stirrup and stood back to run an approving eye over his staunch sorrel.

"Yes, sir," he agreed heartily, "das is good horse I got dere. Good horse, sho. And dere is one t'ing about das horse. He don't kick. No, sir, he never do kick." He repeated the pleasant truth slowly: "He never do kick. No, sir; das is one good t'ing about das horse. Good t'ing, sho. He never do — "

The magnate and Champetre departed

at a sharp trot that quickly overtook the scholar, who never lingered to chat when work was done. Champetre reined to a walk, grinning, but Reneau kicked a foot free of the stirrup and bent one knee around the horn of his saddle, saying:

"When Moise begins to talk about das horse he 's got — mon Dieu!" Champetre roared with delight, but the scholar, who would have died gladly for the big Monsieur, did not laugh. Instead, he turned to M. Reneau with a courtly protest:

"Mais, M. Reneau, das *is* nice horse M. Moise have. Certainly, certainly, sho!"

Camusette had ruthlessly interrupted M. Moise's discourse as soon as the others left.

"You ain't hear yet about somebody das come run to Reneau's house, ha?" he demanded.

M. Moise slowly withdrew his satisfied glance from his sorrel's reliable legs.

"No, sir," he returned courteously, "I ain't never hear of any body das come run to M. Reneau's house. Mais, if ever I hear das somebody come run, I will send you word. Yes, sir, I will send you word, sho."

The talk about his horse, the question, and the answer had made M. Moise the last man to leave the scene of the fence building, and if M. Paul's pony had not picked up a pebble, M. Moise would have ridden home alone, for he was merciful to his horse, knowing well what a weight it carried, and he was perplexed anew by the wording of the dago's question. Why should he expect Marie to run to Reneau's house?

Paul put the pony's foot down as M. Moise came opposite, sprang to saddle, and reined his bony little beast alongside with a gallant air.

"I believe, me, dis horse love pebble better dan he love corn," he said gaily. "If dere 's stone he can reach, voilà, he pick him up."

"Sho, sho," M. Moise sympathized, and if it occurred to him that the pony looked as though it had rather more pebbles than corn, he did not say so.

"Yes," Paul assured him, "he love pebble. But he is good horse. Oh, he can run! If I put dis horse on track —" he finished the sentence with a gesture of magnificence, and asked:

"Eh bien, Moise, what you t'ink about das fellow yonder? To me, seems like he is queer chap. Sit down like das all summer, and don't do not'ing to his place. Mon Dieu, I wish to know where my place would be if I set down like das *one day!*"

M. Moise had dropped his reins to the sorrel's neck and was contentedly rolling a cigarette. He said, "Sho, sho," and

passed his pouch over to Paul. He, and everybody else, knew that it was Madame Paul and Hérbert that worked the Paul place, but M. Moise listened courteously, and the little man ran on:

"And I have had to work dis summer! Mon Dieu, the way grass have grow! So much rain, ha, Moise?"

It had been a dry summer, but the big Monsieur never argued about the weather or anything else. So he nodded now and smoked.

M. Paul lighted his cigarette, blew a whiff of the good tobacco, and said with charity:

"I reckon, me, maybe 't is because he have no children why das queer fellow yonder don't wish to work. If a man ain't got some children, for what he wish to work? For what he wish to live?"

"Sho," M. Moise said in cordial assent. "Man should have children. Yes, sir, man should have children," and his

contented tones took on a deeper content, for his house was in sight now, and, like a sweet scent from a flower, suggestions of home were coming to meet him, — Madame's gay greeting; a good supper of gumbo and bread; peaceful talk in the twilight, with Madame in a chair at his side, and Aluin, big and broad, on the steps. "Sho," he repeated, "man should have children. Better come in house, Paul."

"Merci," Paul replied graciously. "'T will be good for my horse to have rest. 'T is *twenty miles* I have ride das horse to-day! Yes, sir; man should have children!"

"Sho," said Monsieur. He slipped the bridle from his sorrel's head and sat down on his own front gallery with a sigh of content:

"Yes, sir; man should have children."

"But dey 's troub', Moise," M. Paul objected. He tipped his chair against

the wall, rested his heels on the front rundle of it, and perched his hat on his knee. "Oh, but yes, dey 's troub'! Mon Dieu! de troub' I have wit' mine!"

M. Moise shook his head doubtfully:

"Das Hérbert you got, he 's pretty square chap."

M. Paul shrugged his shoulders grandly:

"Oh, mais oui, he pretty square chap, Hérbert is. But I have de troub' wit' him. And I hear, me, you been have de troub' wit' your Aluin. How das is, Moise?"

The big Monsieur smiled humorously:

"No, sir; I ain't never had no troub' wit' Aluin."

"C'est vrai!" uttered M. Paul. "I t'ought, me, 't would be de troub' for you to have him make love wit' das little stranger girl so much. I hear, me, 't is all de time he talk wit' her; 't is all de time he fetch her flower; 't is every day

he give her lead pencil, — *long, red, lead pencil* das ain't never been sharp'! My Madame say, 'Mot'er in Heaven! I wish to know what 't is das Marie Micou do wit' so much lead pencil!' But I tell her, me, 'Das Marie Micou, she is stranger. Maybe 't is in das place where she come from dose people dere *eat* de lead pencil.'"

M. Paul laughed gaily at this witty notion that had occurred to him in the telling, and then jumped up quickly, sorry to his heart that he had hurt the big Monsieur.

"Voilà, Moise," he said and offered a parting hand. "I was just play wit' you. I reckon das boy you got ain't said t'ree words to das little stranger girl since she 's been on Bayou. Eh bien, I reckon my horse is rest'. I better be going. *Bon* jour!"

M. Paul went stepping stylishly away to his horse, and Madame came out and sat down by M. Moise and said:

"Mais, cher! Das can't be so, what he say about Aluin."

Monsieur turned to meet her troubled brows and doubtful eyes:

"Das Zeno Paul," he said. "He lie heap."

"Yes," Madame cried, "he lie heap, but me, I wish to know which time 't is he lie. I wish to know if 't is his first talk das is lie, or if 't is his last talk."

Monsieur looked away at the setting sun. His boy in love with a girl who was being tracked and followed like a thief — or worse!

"I don't know, me, if 't is his first talk das is lie, or not," he summed up slowly.

"Oh, cher," Madame appealed, "I can't believe, me, Aluin — " she stopped. Some one was coming through their front gate. It was Valère Dupré.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE WORDS UNDER THE HAT

Valère came up the path between the flowers in M. Moise's front yard, and tried to walk as becomes a man who brings a cause for grave complaint. Since Aluin had left him with that jesting reproof he had been struggling to reach this goal — to lay his wrongs before the big Monsieur. And now his goal was reached. There was the big Monsieur waiting on the gallery; here was Valère and his wrongs. All he had to do now was to say the words he had been saying over and over as he struggled along, lest he should forget them — lest they should run away from him, as words so often did.

"Bon jour, Valère," Madame said quickly. And:

"Bon jour, Valère," Monsieur greeted, adding kindly, "won't you come in house?"

Valère did not say "Bon jour." He clung to his hat, and to the words he had brought:

"M. Moise, if girl can't have two boys, den boy can't have two girls. No!" Ah, he had said them, those words! They had not got away! Valère pulled his hat down hard on top of his ears, and laughed aloud.

"Ma foi, Valère!" Madame said softly.

Valère was not heeding her; his eyes, round and bright, were watching M. Moise with unblinking anxiety.

"No, sir," Monsieur answered gravely. "No, sir; it ain't right for boy to have two girls. Ain't right, sho."

Valère, in triumph, pulled his hat completely over his ears and held it there with both hands.

"Then for why you don't make Aluin quit das?" he cried indignantly. "Dog-gone! You do just like one fool!"

Madame uttered a sharp "Pas bon!" but M. Moise asked patiently, courteously:

"And what 't is you wish I make Aluin quit, maybe, Valère?"

"Make him quit das have two girls," Valère cried, and gripping his hat tightly lest the bursting sentences slip from under it, he laid his wrongs before the big Monsieur:

"Me, I wish to pet hair wit' Félicie — mais non, Félicie is for Aluin! So, me, I get me not'er girl. I get me Marie Micou — mais oui, she wear my rose in hair! All time she do like das! To-day I was talk wit' her après l'école, and voilà Aluin! 'Ha, Valère, for why 't is you talk wit' my girl?' 'T is das how he say! — Marie Micou, she is not for him, she is for me —"

"Eh bien, Valère," Madame interjected. "Aluin was just play wit' you."

"Mais non, he ain't play," Valère maintained, and clung to his hat, until only now and then could bright gleams be caught from his eyes, peering from beneath it so wistfully at M. Moise.

"Mais, non! he ain't play. Doggone, you do just like one fool! Ain't he all time bring her rose, bring her pencil, bring her t'ing on paper? Mais non, he ain't play." And Valère turned in anxious entreaty to M. Moise:

"You going make him quit das, if you please, Monsieur? Marie Micou, she is for me. She wear my rose in hair — all time. She don't wear Aluin's rose, non!"

"Sho, sho," M. Moise said soothingly, but he said it mechanically. He was not heeding that pitiful pleading. His hand had opened and closed on Madame's, and

he was feeling her thin fingers, troubled, trembling in his palm.

Valère, pleased and comforted by that mechanical assurance, took off his hat, and gave his host and hostess a polite good day; but if Monsieur or Madame heard him, or if they answered him, they never knew. They did not see Valère as he made his difficult way down the path to the gate. Together they were looking at the western band of pines behind which the sunset had been fading so peacefully — this time yesterday. It was all dun-colored masses now, with here and there clear streaks that looked clean — clean as Marie Micou's hands. Yet though they looked so steadily at them, they hardly knew when the dun masses above the pine-tops, and those ghastly clean streaks beneath, merged into one drift of dusk. Hand in hand, M. Moise and his Madame sat together, fronting this harsh truth mutely, as they

had faced together that loss of long ago. Neither moved; neither spoke; but after a little, the asters by the gate moved and nodded, stirred by a breeze from fluttering skirts. There were eager footsteps coming up the sanded pathway; there was an eager voice saying sweetly, timidly:

"Madame Moise?"

At the sound of that voice the clasped hands leaped to a closer clasp, but it was not now that Madame's ready tongue could give its quick response. Monsieur, usually so slow of speech, answered the appeal and said at once:

"Bon soir, Marie. Won't you come in house?"

"Non merci, Monsieur; I t'ank you," Marie returned hurriedly. "Madame, she is at home?"

"Voici Madame," Monsieur returned kindly, and leaned nearer to his little Madame, saying gently:

"'T is Marie Micou, Bébé. She wish to speak wit' you."

"Bon soir, Marie," said Madame at last, but she could say no more. Her lips were dry, and her throat choked. Madame was scared. What did Marie Micou wish with her?

Marie lost no time in setting forth her wishes.

She ran up the steps, seized Madame's free hand, crowded into it a hard little package, and cried:

"Voilà, de stove!"

"Stove?" uttered Madame.

"Mais oui," Marie cried eagerly. "Dose mesdames, dey send me t'ree dollar for das last mouchoir I make. 'T is but now das Madame Sam fetch it me. Voilà, de stove. Madame Sam will be proud. 'T is *you* say das. Madame Sam will be proud. Dere won't be woman on Bayou so proud like Madame Sam if she have stove."

"Sho, sho," Monsieur said, to cover his Madame's silence. "Madame will take money, and she will make buy for you like she say she will make. Mais, Marie, I reckon 't will be one week before she can do like das."

"One week?" Marie cried in distress.

"Mais oui," Monsieur sympathized with her disappointment. "Bat, he ain't got some stoves in store now. I hear him tell man like das, — 't is yesterday. But if you wish das Madame take money, and make buy for you, when Bat get some stoves in store, she will do like das for you. Like das, sho!"

It was a long speech for M. Moise to make, and the length of it, and the steadiness told on his Madame's shaken nerves. She took up the tale with a touch of her usual vivacity:

"Mais oui, Marie. I will buy stove for you when stove comes. Mais, maybe

you better keep your money in your hand — "

"Non, non," Marie protested. "You will keep it, if you please, Madame. And Madame Sam she will be proud. 'T is in one week she will be proud."

"You better stop and rest, Marie," M. Moise suggested kindly. "'T is long way you come, and 't will be long way you go."

"Non merci, Monsieur. I have not de time. 'T is Valère Dupré das walk wit' me, and he have de legs. Ah, Heaven! He have de legs." There were shy thanks sweetly repeated, timid farewells, and hurrying footsteps, and Marie was gone, leaving the unhappy ones to their unhappiness, and leaving with them also a troubled doubt to give their unhappiness a wilder twist.

"'T is funny how she do," Madame said. "I wish to know, me, if she have head. If she go wit' das Valère, I can't

believe, me, Aluin would wish to go wit' her" — she started up all alive with a glad thought:

"Oh, cher, maybe 't is Valère lie!"

Monsieur shook his head slowly:

"Das Valère Dupré, he don't lie, no!"

"Mais, maybe, Aluin was just play wit' him. Just —"

Monsieur could see only the truth of it. He shook his head again:

"If he take her pencil das is long and red, and ain't never been sharp' — 't is dix sous dey cost, dose pencil."

Hope, however, was alive once more in Madame's heart.

"Maybe dose pencil ain't long; maybe dey ain't red. 'T is Zeno Paul say das, and —" Her hope failed her.

"Oh, cher!" she appealed, "I wish to know if 't was M. Paul's *first* talk das was lie, or if it was his *last* talk, maybe?"

Monsieur turned toward her:

"Bébé," he said gently, "das day in

school when Aluin wish to have fight wit' Hérbert Paul, 't was about Marie Micou he wished to fight. Ain't you t'ink about das? And das night when he was sit on steps dere and tell you dere ain't nobody ever kiss Marie Micou good-night. Mon Dieu, I don't know, me, why I ain't never t'ink *den* how 't was wit' him!"

Madame crept closer with a whisper:

"And me, I ain't never t'ought 't all," she sighed.

And so silence came again, and they sat forgetful of bedtime, forgetful of rest and of weariness, watching the stars having their way with the night.

Monsieur at last broke the silence, saying heavily:

"If I knew, me, for why she wash her hands so much."

It always made Madame savage to see her old man suffer. She lost sense of her own pain now in a passion of pity for him, and said indignantly:

"If she have people, I wish to know, me, for why dey don't come get her. Das ain't way for young girl to do. Run here, run dere like she was stray turkey! Her people should come get her, and take her home, and shut her in house. Ma foi! I wish to know what kind of people 't is das let young girl go trav' like she was turkey!"

"I reckon she ain't got some people, maybe, Bébé," Monsieur said, and his voice was a shade less sad. Then the dago's question settled down on him and again he put it deliberately, wretchedly:

"If I knew, me, for why she wash her hands so much!"

Madame took another sharp departure in search of comfort:

"Oh, she have to wash her hands so much for das sewing she do. Madame Sam was talk to me 'bout das. She say dose mouchoirs, dey get dirty so *easy*, yes! And she say de people won't pay

if 't is dirty. Won't pay 't all. Voilà, cher! She say dose mesdames tell her first time if de people ain't satisfied — 't is how dey say — ain't *satisfied,* den dey don't pay Marie not'ing and dey don't pay Madame Sam not'ing for fetch work. I reckon Marie keep her hands clean for das. And maybe 't is Aluin is just play wit' her," she added hopefully.

"Non," Monsieur decided. "I don't reckon he is play wit' her. I reckon he is going make marry wit' her. And if he love her, Bébé, he should make marry wit' her. Das is right. Boy should make marry wit' girl he love."

"Yes," Madame admitted, and she put the converse clearly:

"If boy don't make marry wit' girl he love, 't is going be bad for baby."

"Sho," said Monsieur. It had been too long in force upon the Bayou to permit of either plea or protest, this law that

required love to be the basis, and only basis, of marriage. Being in force, and having been long in force, it was responsible in part for the beauty of the Bayou children — for their laughing strength and length of life. Love endures.

"Sho," said the big Monsieur. "Boy should make marry wit' girl he loves."

Eh bien, before the immutable laws of God man bares his head.

M. Moise bared his head, bared it black as a coal with all the fine uplift of youth; but the baring of it bowed that big black head a bit, and day by day took the blackness from its temples; took the thickness from its crown. Monsieur who had been wont to come in and out with the spring of springy arteries, now began to go more slowly; stopping in the doorway to look out at the pine trees washing their tops in the morning mist; at the clouds washing the earth with their fulness; at the work of the wild winds wiping the

sunset clean. Ah, Heaven, so much of washing and making clean must the big Monsieur stop to look upon! The brown Bayou washing the pilings of its bridge, the dew-drops washing the flowers! It would seem that the weight of all that washing fell heavily upon Monsieur's shoulders. Those shoulders of his, strong as a bull's and broad; shoulders that had carried the load of little children's grief and of strong men's perplexities; borne, too, the more wearying burden of woman's worries, — those stout shoulders began to bend now beneath the weight laid upon them by one pair of little, clean, girlish hands.

"If I knew, me, for why she wash her hands so much," he said wistfully to his Madame again and again as the heavy days drew by. It was the only moan he made.

"Pauvre garçon!" Madame would sob under her breath as she watched him

going slowly to his work or pausing wearily over some task that had seemed but a plaything a week ago. "Pauvre garçon! Das Marie Micou going most kill my old man. Ma foi! I wish to know, me, what for her people don't come get her! Ma foi! I wish, me, I could spank das Aluin wit' board, yes! If Marie have people, I t'ink, me, she better go back to her people. 'T is not for young girl to go trav' like she was stray turkey. I should t'ink Madame Sam would tell her das. If das old scholard ain't take her in his house so fast, she ain't never stay on Bayou. But das scholard! He all time make mess! Ma foi! I wish to know for why a man want make mess all time, maybe. If das little L'Un ain't stop her in road, she ain't never come in schoolhouse. She ain't never see Aluin 't all. But das little L'Un he is *bad* chap. All time he is *bad* chap. I should t'ink his mamma should

whip him for das. Stopping stranger girl in middle of road to talk wit' her. Das ain't way for little chap to do. Ain't way 't all."

But for all her indignation and for all the ache in the mother heart of her, that yearned over the big Monsieur as if he had been a baby that suffered in her arms, Madame Moise could do nothing; nothing but make the best gumbo and the best bread and the best coffee that it had ever been given her to make; nothing but be ready always with a word of cheer, a hopeful doubt, a reason why Marie should necessarily keep her hands so clean. This Madame did while her own heart mourned its loss in secret, the loss of the daughter she had hoped to have, the daughter with brown eyes full of laughter and a crown of warm, brown hair:

"Ah, Heaven!" she whispered to the silences, "I should have been glad for

Félicie. I should have been proud for *her*."

And yet, one other thing Madame Moise could do, must do, indeed, for the money was in her hand. She must buy the stove for Madame Sam.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A BARGAIN

YES, Madame Moise must buy that stove for Madame Sam. Never for a moment did she doubt that. Nor was it Madame Sam who had taken in the stranger, who had insisted that the stranger go to school. It was M. Santerre who was to blame; Madame Moise recognized that. As soon as word came that Bat Santerre had received his new stock of stoves, she set out to make the purchase and went willingly.

"It will be fine for Sara," she said. "I 'm glad, me, she will have stove before she die."

So down the Bayou to Bat Santerre's store went Madame Moise. A little while ago — only one week — how gay would have been her going! Madame shook

her head under its bobbing black bonnet. Her day for glad things was over and done with. Not that she bowed or bent before this blow. The live little Madame was full of fire and fight, and though to fight was useless and the fire of no avail, the hot stuff was there, and the little Madame got the good of it, in at least that it kept her well warmed up. Inwardly she berated Marie for having come to the Bayou, and inwardly she berated Aluin for having fallen in love with the wrong girl, and all this energetic berating kept Madame Moise bright-eyed and eager, and ever on the alert to seize some chance to comfort her old man's aching heart. Of his heaviest trouble — the dago's question — she knew nothing.

Along the Bayou Madame went. The white path followed every turn and twist of the brown water, and every turn had a meaning, every twist a remembrance. Here was the shelving bank and sandy

bottom where L'Un had ducked Josephine. And when Hérbert's wrath had fallen upon them for their irreverent treatment of his girl, here was the path the little chaps had traveled as they carried to Josephine their dearest one — their spotted kid — as a peace offering.

"Poor little devils," Madame Moise said softly. She had been an eye-witness of that pilgrimage for pardon. L'Un marching manfully with the kid in his arms and little L'Autre following, sucking in his chin and patting the kid's bit of tail in a valiant effort to attain to L'Un's standard of manhood.

"Poor little devils. I know, me, dey is bad, but I 'm glad 'Zephine give dem back dere kid. 'T is fine girl, das Josephine. She ain't so full of fun like Félicie is," Madame stopped and sighed.

"I t'ink, me, she was love Aluin long time. I t'ink so. Eh bien."

And so Madame's bonnet bobbed along,

bend after bend, until she began to near Bat's store, and to be conscious of the wad of money tied up in her handkerchief.

"Eight dollars!" she said suddenly aloud. Madame had boarded school-teachers, and the 'Cajan "dollar" had gained a frill in her speech. It seemed a great deal of money to be spending all at one time. "Eight dollars!" The responsibility of it began to weigh upon Madame.

"I pray God, me, Bat 's got some nice stove dere. Eight dollars! 'T is too much money to spend for just one t'ing. I believe, me, I will make Bat give me pot aussi. Ma foi! If I can make him give me tea-kettle." And Madame began to glow with the bargain fever, so quick it is and vain, that human yearning to get something for nothing.

"But if I can make him t'row in tea-kettle — "

Voilà, Madame had reached the store.

There was nobody there but the owner, busy with his stock in the rear, and Madame drew a deep breath as she walked back slowly looking at the folds of cloth on the shelves, the rolls of ribbon in the show-cases, and the stick candy in the jars.

"Bat 's got nice store here," she reflected with complacent pride, — for Bat was a Bayou boy. "I reckon if he ain't make marry wit' one of M. Reneau's girls and have to live so fine he could get stove for his mamma, maybe. Mais das 'Torine! She wants so much. I hear, me, she is going have her fence whitewashed again, and 't is not *t'ree years* since it was whitewashed last time! Bon jour, Bat!"

"Madame Moise! Bon Jour!" Bat stretched an eager hand over the counter and Madame clasped it cordially:

"And 'Torine and de children, dey is well? Yes?"

"Mais oui, Madame. Dey do fine. Et toi?"

"Yes," said Madame. "T'ank you. I 'm right well, me."

"C'est bon," Bat remarked heartily. Then he added with concern:

"I see M. Moise T'ursday. Seem like he ain't look' so hearty."

"Oui? T'ursday?"

"T'ursday. He ain't been sick, maybe?"

"Mais non, he ain't been sick!"

"I 'm glad, me," Bat said, and he meant it.

Madame spoke of the weather: "Das rain we have last week, 't was fine for my turnip. Me, two, t'ree days I had plant seed and das rain bring dem *right* up."

"Bien," Bat commented cordially.

"And you?" Madame inquired courteously.

"No," Bat admitted, "we did n't get our turnip plant till after rain."

Madame was ready with a word of comfort:

"I reckon, me, 't is good t'ing for you, maybe. You see how 't is, Bat, when rain bring up seed, it bring up grass aussi."

"Mais oui, Madame. And 't is so papa say aussi. But me, I like to see t'ings come up."

"Et moi aussi!" and Madame laughed, laughed merrily. Voici, it is so exhilarating this going abroad to buy! Even though she be all heart-broken and unhappy, if she have French blood in her, Madame must laugh when she buys.

"Voilà, Bat," Madame cried gaily, "you can't t'ink what 't is I come abroad to buy."

Bat put on, promptly, his pleasantest smile:

"Some clot', maybe? I got some nice —"

"Oh, mais non! 'T is not clot'."

"'T is some grocerie, maybe? I have just —"

"Mais non, 't is not grocerie. You can't t'ink, ha? 'T is stove!"

"Stove!" Bat looked astounded, and Madame laughed more merrily than before.

"Mais oui! Stove! I wish to know if you have some nice stove. La gross comme-ça! And bright! I don't want any you' old rusty stove. No!"

"Oui, I got some nice stoves," Bat assured her, "and dey 's bright. Dey 's new. 'T is only yesterday I get dem in. You will come dis way —"

Bat led the way to his little hardware department and Madame followed, commenting freely on all she saw:

"I see you have plenty soap! I wish to know, me, if you going get some of das octagon soap, maybe?"

Bat asked alertly:

"You t'ink das good soap, das octagon?"

Madame shrugged:

"Oh, I don't know, me! I ain't buy some soap since I get married. I 'm like your mamma. She laugh, she tell me she can take two, t'ree old bones and some pitch and some lye and make heap better soap dan she can buy in store."

"Aussi, mamma make good soap," Bat said proudly.

"Certainment, she make good soap," Madame Moise assented courteously. "Dere ain't Madame on Bayou — And das is dose stove you t'ink so fine, ha?"

"Ain't dey bright?" Bat demanded.

"Yes," Madame said doubtfully, "dey is bright."

"Ain't dey big?"

Madame looked the stove over and put up her lips slowly:

"I don't know if dey is big enough

for price. What 't is you ask for stove like das, maybe?"

"Eight dollars."

"Eight dollars! Huite! Oh, mais non! Das stove ain't big enough for eight dollars, Bat."

"'T is how man das make it t'ink," Bat protested.

"Ma foi!" Madame said slightingly. "Man das make das stove don't get eight dollars for it. He don't get five dollars for it. Ma foi! Ain't I know how das is? Man das make das stove sell it to factory; factory sell it to man in New Orleans; man in New Orleans sell it to you, — every man das sell it make dollar on it, — and you, you t'ink you going sell it to me. Maybe! But not for eight dollars, no!"

Bat laughed.

"Bien! I sell it to you for eight dollars, yes. But den I t'row in some-t'ing."

"And what das is you going t'row in," Madame said smiling. "Let me see *das*, if you please."

Bat picked up a five-cent pipkin and brushed the dust from it with a magnificent gesture.

"Somet'ing like dis I will t'row in because 't is you — "

"Somet'ing like das," Madame took up indignantly. "Oh, mon Dieu, I can buy pot like das for five cents. Why you don't be *big* man and t'row in match for make fire in stove, maybe."

Bat grinned good-naturedly at the sarcasm.

"'T is nice little pot," he insisted.

"'T is little, sho," Madame granted gaily, and looked around. There on the shelf was the tea-kettle she coveted, but it was worth a dollar if it was worth a dime.

"I reckon, me," she shrugged, "what you t'row in ain't going be wort' so

much, maybe. I believe, me, I would rat'er pay you seven dollars for stove."

"Mais, Madame! Stove is wort' more dan seven dollars."

"Wort' *more* dan seven dollars! I wish to know, me, what 't is make stove wort' so much money. 'T is made of iron, and iron is *cheap*. Yes! Voilà, de plow chain my old man buy for seventy-five cents. Aussi, plow-chain iron is strong iron. But de iron in dis stove, 't is t'in. Ma foi! I never did see iron so t'in like dis door is. I can most stick pin t'rough it."

Bat laughed.

"Mais non, das door is strong iron," he insisted pleasantly. "And 't is pretty door, too. Look dose flowers. What kind of flower you t'ink das is, maybe?"

Madame looked, her bright eyes peering alertly at iron blossom and iron leaf:

"'T is rose, maybe?"

"Non, 't is finer flower dan rose," Bat triumphed. "'T is pomegranate."

"Pomegranate," Madame echoed in shrill disdain. "Pas bon! Pomegranate. 'T is Jew flower. 'T is Jew stove. Ha, Bat! I know, me, I ain't going pay but seven dollars for your old Jew stove."

"Mais non, 't is Catholic stove," Bat retorted readily. "'T was Catholic man I buy it from. Eh bien, Madame. If you don't t'ink das pot big enough I can t'row in one like das, maybe."

Madame Moise eyed the ten-cent saucepan with derision.

"If you t'row in ten pots like das, maybe I buy your old Jew stove," she declared calmly.

"But, me, I ain't got ten pots like dis," Bat pointed out.

Madame glanced over his stock.

"C'est vrai," she admitted and sighed. Then she brightened: "Mais voilà! You have tea-kettle. You can t'row in tea-

kettle, Bat." She made the concession genially.

Bat looked horrified:

"Mais, mon Dieu! Das tea-kettle cost me dollar!"

"Maybe," Madame admitted. "Mais, Bat," and she put it with kindly pity in her tones, "dis stove, it did n't cost you eight dollars, no!"

Bat flushed under the thrust.

"But man must make his profit," he cried.

"Make *some* profit, mais oui. And de people das buy, dey must make some profit aussi. Voilà, you make some profit on stove, you make some profit on tea-kettle. You t'row in tea-kettle wit' stove, and me, I make some profit on my buy."

Bat picked up a big pot.

"I can t'row in dis, maybe," he said dubiously.

"But, me, I wish das you t'row in tea-kettle," Madame explained gently and —

"Prêté l'oreille, Bat, eight dollars is too much money to pay for one t'ing." She put it convincingly.

"I can sell you stove and tea-kettle for eight dollar and fifty cents," Bat said sorrowfully.

"But, me, I ain't got but eight dollars." Madame shook her head over the sorrow of it.

"If I don't make not'ing but freight, I can sell dem to you for eight dollar and quarter," Bat conceded unhappily.

Madame shook her head again, and as over a greater sorrow.

"I ain't got quarter, Bat, I ain't got dime. Voilà what 't is I have." She untied her handkerchief and stacked the silver — dollars and halves and quarters — in tempting little shining pillars on the counter. That done she spread her hands wide and said again:

"Voilà!"

And Bat did look at it. Not every

day did he make cash sales to that amount. But —

"Mais, Madame. If I sell you stove and tea-kettle for eight dollar den tout le monde will t'ink I should sell — "

"Non," Madame corrected quickly. "I don't tell *nobody*, me, what 't is I pay for my buy."

"Bien," Bat said. "You take dem for eight dollar. You wish I put dem on gallery for M. Moise when he pass up road wit' wagon?"

Madame pushed the stack of silver over to him:

"Non, merci," she said calmly. "'T is not my old man das stop for dem. 'T is for your mamma I buy das stove."

"For my mamma?"

"Mais oui, certainment."

"Mais, mais," stammered Bat, getting hot with a red-hot thought. "Pardon, Madame, but for who das money is?"

"'T is for you."

"'T is for you?"

"Mais non. Das money is not for me! 'T is one week since Marie Micou run up steps, and put das money in my hand, and say to me:

"'S'il vous plaît, Madame, when you go 'broad to buy, you will take das money and buy stove for Madame Sam.' Et, voilà! I have bought stove."

Bat shook his head:

"Den dis money, it is for Marie Micou," he began, but Madame whirled upon him like a fury:

"Ferme!" she commanded. "First 't is your papa come say das money, it is for Marie Micou; den my old man he say das money it is for Marie Micou; and you t'ink you going say aussi das money it is for Marie Micou? Ferme! If money is for Marie Micou den 't is for her to do like she wish? She wish to give it me for buy stove for Madame Sam, and she give it me; and me, I

have buy stove for Madame Sam. Put dose dollars in drawer! and when your papa pass up road wit' wagon tell him to take das stove along. Tell him 't is *me* say das. Ma foi! Seem like every man on Bayou wish to twist his tongue to keep your mamma from have stove. And 't is since she was married she 's been most crazy for stove. T'irty-t'ree years she have been want, now she *have!*"

Into the pause Bat spoke like a man escaping from a shower:

"Mais oui, Madame," he said. He put the money into his cash drawer, then he began to put things on the stove. The tea-kettle, the big pot, the little pot, and the pipkin.

"Don't das look nice?" he asked. "Mamma will be proud."

Madame looked and her eyes shone. She well knew that the store-keeper could ill afford to give such gifts:

"You are one good boy, Bat San-

terre," she said softly. "Dere won't be Madame on Bayou so proud like your mamma will be. Oh, I t'ank God, me, she 's going have das stove."

Before Bat could join in the thanksgiving, there came through the store the echo of a step that rang sharp and firm on the gallery. A tall, muscular man filled the doorway for an instant, then came swinging down the passageway between the counters, walking with a long, strong stride. It was the sheep magnate, father-in-law of the store-keeper.

Bat shot a warning look at Madame Moise and Madame shot back a look of perfect comprehension:

"Mais oui, moi sais," she murmured. She turned to greet the great man with a gracious:

"Bon jour."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DAYS OF PURPLE AND GOLD

"MADAME MOISE! It is de plea*sure!*" the magnate cried. He bowed over Madame's hand and inquired courteously:

"Comme-ça-va?"

"Bien," said Madame. "And you?"

"Well, t'ank you," the magnate told her genially. "And Moise, he is well aussi?"

"He is right well," Madame began, then she met the magnate's eye and saw it film over:

"Sho," he said. "Moise don't ride like he used. I see him yesterday. He was get' on his horse — slow. Eh bien, some day me and Moise going quit being young fellows. 'T is long time we been das. He make his fifty-six years

next winter, and me I got fifty-eight years now."

Fifty-eight! Tall, strong man that he was, with the leathery skin of a herder, and the eyes of an eagle, deep-chested, straight as a sapling, he did not look a day over thirty-eight, and Madame's smile of incredulity was not entirely a matter of courtesy:

"I reckon, me, M. Reneau, 't will be good while maybe before you quit being young fellow," she said.

"Ha?" Reneau laughed, "you t'ink you keep me young, den you can keep your old man young aussi. Das is how you t'ink, ha, Madame Moise?"

He put a gallant hand to Madame's sleeve and they walked through the store and out upon the gallery, smiling at the joke.

When they reached the gallery, the smile left the magnate's eyes and he

turned to the little Madame with kindly concern:

"What das is I been hear about your Aluin? Lie, maybe?"

Madame met the question with brave eyes:

"Non, Monsieur," she said, "I don't t'ink, me, 't is lie."

"I 'm sorry," Reneau told her sincerely. "Sorry, sho. When I see Moise get on his horse slow like das yesterday, I t'ink, me, 't was das."

Madame's face flushed up and broke:

"'T is hard on him," she said unsteadily.

"My God, yes! Tough, sho," he turned with grave gallantry to the plucky little woman at his side:

"And for you aussi, 't is tough."

"Oh, for me!" Madame flung out her hands. "'T is n't wit' woman as 't is wit' man. Woman can cry."

"Sho. Cry, sho," the magnate agreed.

There seemed to be nothing more to say about it. Madame Moise could have talked all day about a hatching of ducks, but about her old man's grief, his cruel disappointment, she could not talk. The magnate was naturally a silent man, silent save when he got mad. When M. Reneau was roused, words poured from him in a roaring cataract. Not even M. Moise might interrupt Reneau's speech when it gave vent to anger. But he was not mad now. Once a woman, very young, had come to him and cried and had not been comforted. His baby sister — his little Marie. Fifteen years ago — and where was she now?

Standing by Madame's side he looked away toward the willows by the bank, with eyes that were full of trouble for past and present. His pride in Moise's fine boy had been second only to Moise's own pride. Madame Moise, seeing,

could offer comfort only for present trouble, so she said:

"Seem like Marie is nice little t'ing — if she is stranger."

The magnate took his gaze from the willows and turned courteously:

"If we knew, Madame, from where she come, and for why she come. She ain't never tell you das, no?"

"She ain't never tell anybody das," Madame sighed.

The magnate said gently:

"Moise should ask her das, Madame. Boy, he ain't going t'ink, but man should t'ink — all time."

"Pauvre garçon," Madame said softly. "I t'ink it is for das he worry so much."

"Sho," said the magnate. "I 'm sorry for him. Sorry, sho!"

Again the magnate turned to stare at the willows, but Madame was too full of her own trouble now to offer comfort. Suppose Marie had done some-

thing wrong, something very wrong. Madame shuddered nervously.

The magnate roused at her slight motion.

"Eh bien," he said, "I got to see Bat about getting me some cot'-meal. 'T will soon be time to begin feed de sheep. I reckon when winter come Moise is glad he ain't got so much mouton as I got."

Madame raised her eyes and gave the smile breeding demanded.

"Maybe 't is he t'ink like das," she agreed pleasantly. "Well, I better be hurry. My old man will be wish' for his supper. Bon jour, Monsieur. You will tell Amelia 't is t'ree weeks I have been watch de gate for her?"

"T'ank you. I will tell her das, sho. Bon jour, Madame," he bowed over her hand, and then Madame's bonnet went bobbing up the Bayou and Monsieur Reneau turned into the store to bargain

for a ton of cotton-seed meal. And under the bobbing and the bargaining beat hearts that ached — ached for the big Monsieur; and under the bobbing and bargaining throbbed thoughts that puzzled — puzzled over Marie Micou.

"Yes, sir," Reneau said to his horse as he rode homeward; "yes, sir, Moise should ask her das. Boy ain't going t'ink, but man should t'ink. If it kill him, he should t'ink. My God! I 'm sorry for Moise."

Madame's thought was taking a more active turn:

"If 't is to ask Marie from where she come and for why she come, I reckon, me, I can do das, maybe. 'T will most kill my old man to do das, but, me, I reckon, maybe, I can do das for him. I reckon I can take her by arm — comme-ça" — and Madame clutched valiantly with both hands at the empty air — "mais oui, take her by bot' arm and

say to her: 'From where 't is you come, ha? For why 't is you come?'" It would not be a pleasant thing to do and Madame made no effort to deny it. "But," she cheered her courage, "if 't is den my old man ain't worry so much —" She broke away from the distasteful task with indignation:

"I reckon Aluin ain't t'ought 'bout das at all. No, not *'t all!*"

Aluin had not thought about it at all. While his father's big head bowed and his mother's bright eyes saddened, Aluin, the well-beloved, was gay with the nervous gaiety of quickened blood. Big, brave, royally alive, he was in love, and the world loved with him. For him the woods put on their purple, the fields put on their gold. For him the Bayou dipped and darted, joying in his joy. And Aluin knew it. Knew, too, that it was nearly time now for the boys to begin to throw sticks at the persimmon

trees. Every morning the days grew keener, sweeter; and, eh bien, every morning Marie Micou came to school and sat across the room from Aluin, studying hard. She was studying very hard, for she was trying to do all the things the scholar had enjoined her to do, — to learn to write, to read what she wrote, and to master the multiplication tables. Very meek was Marie behind her down-dropped lashes, obeying Madame Sam's slightest word, honoring Monsieur's commands, following Félicie like a shadow. But yes, very meek! Never once had teacher found any fault in Marie Micou; never once had her mates made complaint against her. Very meek, — but with Aluin Moise she was not meek, no! If he offered her a rose she would refuse it with a demure:

"Non merci."

If Aluin persisted and laid the rose on her desk, Marie would sweep it to

the floor with a gesture that was not demure. And Aluin, with a teasing "Bien merci," would pick up the rejected flower and wear it on his coat all day.

Any other boy in the school would have been discouraged or disgusted, but Aluin was delighted. He had never before been refused a request, never before had to fight for what he wanted, and he entered upon the conquest with a zest that knew no palling. He had picked Marie Micou for his girl and one day she would be his Madame. Aluin was as sure of the one as of the other. And when the school had closed for the summer term "when de boys begin to t'row sticks at persimmon trees," he meant to have a little talk with Marie and teach her to know what he knew. It was the thought of this talk that made him make such terrible mistakes in his multiplication tables

sometimes, and it was the thought of this talk that kept him silent so long the evening Madame, his mother, came home from her shopping expedition down the Bayou.

Unconscious of the mother and father who sat so soberly in their chairs on the gallery above him, Aluin sat smoking silently on the bottom step until M. Moise interposed kindly.

"You don't want to smoke too much cigarette, Aluin," he advised.

Aluin answered gently without turning:

"I ain't smoking, papa."

Madame's hand slipped into Monsieur's and was crushed there. Their boy had been smoking steadily for an hour, but neither of them said anything. Nothing, indeed, was said until Aluin, driven by the desire to be alone, got up and went to his room in the rear, with a dreamy "Bon soir."

When he was well out of hearing Madame sighed.

"I reckon he will be talk' to her pretty soon now, cher," she said softly.

M. Moise drew a breath, and after a a bit he said thoughtfully, and very slowly:

"If I knew, me, what for she wash her hand so much."

Madame thought of Reneau's words but she did not repeat them. She instead cried cheerfully:

"I don't believe, me, she wash her hands so much as she use'? And Sara, aussi, she say she don't believe Marie wash her hands so much. She say she t'ink maybe 't is because Marie sew so much. And she tell me how 't is. Say she never did see work get dirty so quick like das work get. And if work get dirty, voilà, cher! dose people dey *won't* pay — won't pay not'ing 't all for das work if it get dirty. And Sara say

das work get dirty easy, yes. Say Marie have to keep her hands clean — *clean* all time, cher. She say Josephine try to learn to do stitch like das. Sara, she laugh' when she was tell me das. She say das work Josephine do was black, black as rag in kitchen, cher!"

"Sho, sho," Monsieur sympathized gently, but after he had considered it the unhappy words came again, only slightly modified in their unhappiness:

"If I knew what for, when she come, she wash her hands so much."

Madame choked and swallowed, and then began, brightly, to tell him of the purchase she had made that afternoon; told eagerly of the stove — how bright and black it was; told joyously about the flowers on the doors — "Pomegranates, cher!" told tenderly about Bat's gift of pots; told triumphantly of her winning of the tea-kettle. And Monsieur, kindly considerate, listened to it

all. But in the end the darkness deepened, the talking failed. Monsieur and Madame rose wearily from their chairs, two lonesome old people defeated in their hoping.

For a moment they stood together, looking away vaguely into the night the sinking moon had left them. Then:

"Eh bien, Bébé," Monsieur said. He turned to enter the house, but in turning his hand brushed her sleeve. At the touch his arm started into sudden life and gathered his little comforter close to his heart.

"T'ank God," Monsieur said gravely when his lips left hers.

"And me," Madame whispered.

And the Giver knew for what gift it was they returned thanks to him, all reverently, there in the dark,—for thirty-five years of loyalty; for thirty-five years of love; for thirty-five years of the deep, sweet comfort of being not alone.

M. Moise slept that night and dreamed neither of hands nor the washing of them, nor yet of questions that might not be answered; but Madame watched the black hours creep past her and thought, thought hard and unhappily, upon the thing she had resolved to do:

"It is like mean t'ing to go ask her question when she have just bought stove for Sara. I reckon, me, she will t'ink, 'Ma foi! I wish to know why Madame Moise ain't ask me some question before she take das money so quick for buy stove for dis fine friend she have.' 'T is mean t'ing to do. Pauvre bébé! If she get in troub' and have to run — 't is for her to know. 'T is not for me to go ask her das. If dog get in troub' and run, dey don't ask him not'ing. I should t'ink de people ought to be kind wit' girl like dey is wit' dog. I should t'ink dey should ask *somebody*. 'T is not right to ask *her*. 'T is to make

her tell lie to go ask her like das. And das little Marie Micou, I know, me, she ain't do not'ing mean since she 's been on Bayou. Maybe — ma foi! I don't know why I ain't t'ink about das! — maybe she don't tell when she come because she 'fraid de people will want her go on because she have come from where fever is. Ma foi! If 't is like das, I wish to know what my old man would t'ink. If 't is like *das!* But no," and Madame's heart got heavy again. "If 't was like das she would tell it to Félicie by now. 'T is most two mont's she have been here and ain't tell nobody. But, me, I must ask her. 'T is too much for my old man, 't will most kill him to go ask young girl tough question like das. And if I don't ask her, den soon as she say yes to Aluin he will have to ask her. 'T is like M. Reneau say. Boy ain't going t'ink, but man must t'ink. Eh bien, and woman also.

But 't will be *hard*. Pauvre bébé! And she have give all her money for stove. If I make her scare wit' asking her so much question, and she run away again, she won't have anyt'ing 't all. Won't even have sou for buy bread. Me!" and Madame sat up suddenly and defied the dark. "Me, I will *not* ask question of Marie Micou till she have chance to make mouchoir again. Den if she run, she will have two dollar and fifty cents to run wit'. Maybe 't is she will have t'ree dollar. I will not ask her till she make mouchoir, *no!*" And upon this resolution — or reprieve — Madame Moise slept.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE LITTLE TALK

ANOTHER handkerchief had not yet been paid for by the Mesdames on Black Bayou, but on Bienvieu the boys had begun to throw sticks at the persimmon trees; and so the time had come, as Aluin had planned it should, for him to have his talk with Marie Micou.

Marie, it would seem, had resolved that the time for that talk should never come. Whenever Aluin came to the Santerre house she was busy, or "gone abroad." Madame Sam made apologies and Aluin took them, smiling good-naturedly while he talked to Madame, smiling slow, shy smiles when he talked to himself, drinking deeply of the joy of her shyness.

"Maybe 't is," he smiled, "if das Mademoiselle Marie don't quit das go abroad so much, she going meet me in road some day."

To give color to this probability Aluin formed the habit of always going in the same direction to hunt his steers or his horse; and when he went to or from the mill with his team, he always went the long way round that crossed the road above the Santerre place. Unless Marie stayed very closely at home, it did seem that she would meet Aluin in the road. But the scholar had made a discovery concerning Marie and had told it in surprise to his Madame, saying:

"You know somet'ing, cherie, when das little stranger girl make her mind, she going stick to das mind she make till she die. Certainly, certainly, sho!"

And Aluin seemed in a fair way to be taught by experience what the scholard had learned by observation.

He might haunt all the roads that led to the Santerre farm or from it, but he would never meet Marie there. When Madame sent her on an errand she took short cuts through glade and thicket and never traveled in the road at all. If Aluin was to be eluded, Marie meant to manage it. But Aluin was not always to be eluded, for chance was playing into his hands.

It was a cool autumn afternoon, late, with a lift of life in the air, and Marie, making the best of time returning from an errand to the Paul place, came swiftly through a thicket out into a glade, and into Aluin's quiet presence.

"Bon jour," Aluin greeted in merry triumph. "Bon jour, Mademoiselle Marie. You are going let me carry das bucket and walk home wit' you, if you please?"

"No t'ank you," Marie said, and there was nothing merry about her way,

of saying it. She moved to pass him with a manner that calmly commanded Aluin to lift his hat and let her pass. Aluin knew what the manner meant, but it was getting late, with the soft, creamy lateness of an October twilight. There were red streaks between the pine trunks where the sun had set, and through the cooler air came now and then gushes, warm as milk just drawn, that lapped softly on lips and hands. Marie Micou looked beautiful in this loving light; looked pale and clear and bright as a star in June.

Aluin did not lift his hat. Instead, he stood still, and the sturdy manhood of him trembled a little, for he knew that the time for his talk had come.

"Why you won't let me walk wit' you, Marie?" he asked, and his tone made Marie know that the time for the talk had come.

Eh bien, Marie meant that the time

should not come — had resolved and would fight for her resolve. She raised her head and her black eyes flamed — a fine, proud fire:

"'T is not right for girl to let boy walk wit' her when she have told anot'er boy das all time she will walk wit' him."

Aluin's face began to get white slowly, but he tried to believe that she played with him; tried also to make her see that he but smiled at her reply.

"And Mademoiselle Marie, she have been told anot'er boy das all time she will walk wit' him, maybe?" he asked humorously.

"Mais oui," Marie said and flinched not.

"Mais oui?" Aluin repeated. He looked into her eyes, almost stupidly. There was no mocking there. "Mais oui?" then he got back to the braver tone:

"And who das boy is, if you please?"

"'T is Valère Dupré."

"Quoi!"

"Mais oui."

"Quoi!"

But Marie could stand no longer and face the hurt and the horror in his eyes. With a dip and a dart of her lithe body she shot past him and would have been fleeing through glade and thicket in a breath, but Aluin swung swiftly and stood before her.

"Marie," he said quietly, "you mean das?"

"Yes," Marie told him straightly, "I mean das."

Aluin raised his hat and stepped from before her, and Marie fled for home — for the only home she knew.

Safe inside the Santerre back yard, Marie stopped to catch her breath. Panting, she looked about her vaguely, and so looking, her eyes lighted upon

a late moon-flower, small and white, at the very top of the vine; the little blossom stood out all alone against the waning light, and Marie thought it looked very lonesome there.

"Pauvre petite," she said softly. "'T is all by itself up dere. It ain't got no papa and it ain't got no mamma. Pauvre petite!" And Marie would have cried a little for the pretty blossom all by itself in its sweetness in the far, sad light had not Félicie at that moment seen her and set up an excited calling from the kitchen door:

"Oh, Marie. Vien! Vien! 'T is come! 'T is come! Oh, il est bien joli! Il est beau! Il est grand! Vien ici! Vien ici!"

And above Félicie's shrill tone came Madame Sam's voice reënforcing her daughter's like a slogan:

"And t'ree pots and a tea-kettle! T'ree pots and a tea-kettle! Vien ici,

Marie! I *wish* you to see! T'ree pots and a *tea-kettle!*"

Marie went to see, crowding into the little kitchen already packed to bursting with Santerres, — eager, excited, wildly happy Santerres.

The stove had come.

"Voilà!" cried Madame, and she waved the pipkin on high. "Voilà!" and she swung the kettle above admiring eyes and heads. "Voilà!" and she beamed above the crowd with a pot in either hand. "Mais, voilà de *stove!*" and in a torrent of plastic French she pointed out to Marie the splendors of her possession. The blackness of it; the brightness! The lids that came off and on; the doors that opened and shut!

"Mais voilà de pomegranate on door!" and down went Madame on her knees, holding the little flaming lamp close to the iron moulding that Marie might see and be happy.

And it was then that Félicie's laughter was heard again in the air. Excited, nervous, but bubbling over with the ridiculousness of it, Félicie's laughter filled the kitchen:

"Oh, mamma! Dose ain't pomegranate flower. Dey is acorn!"

"Acorn," cried Madame. "Acorn." She laughed as though she would cry. She caught Félicie and clasped her and kissed her.

"Acorn," she called to them all. "Acorn!"

Ah, but yes, Madame Sam was proud. Marie had had her wish — had had almost more than she dared to wish for. Félicie was proud also. Marie looked from glad mother to glad daughter. How their eyes shone! There was not a Madame on Bienvieu so proud like Madame Sam. And yet Marie's thoughts could not stay with the glad scene: they must go back to the little moon-flower

leaning lonesomely under the stars. Poor, pretty blossom, it had neither father nor mother, and was all by itself in the night.

Aluin, after a bit, had begun to walk on, with his eyes to the front yet not seeing at all where he went. And so he came upon the Paul twins, and stood stupidly looking from one to the other with idle eyes.

L'Un was standing up swearing his "Godamit" as hard as he could. L'Autre sat in the grass hugging his knees unhappily. Aluin, looking on idly, began to understand that the little chaps were in great trouble.

"Qui c'est?" he demanded mechanically.

"She won't blow," L'Un exploded. "Godamit, I don't know, me, what for she won't blow!"

Little L'Autre took up the sad story, telling it over like a tolling bell:

"We get brick; we get can; we get cane —"

"But she won't blow!" L'Un cut in. "Godamit, she won't *blow!*"

L'Autre went on with his dreary rehearsal:

"We make fire in brick, we put water in can, we make steam go t'rough cane —"

"But she won't blow!" And L'Un would have done some more swearing if Aluin, at last enlightened, had not knelt down beside the toy sugar mill they had made, and begun a careful examination of the furnace, boiler, and steam pipe. The twins had made a clever job of it. The furnace made of brick-bats put together with mud was provided with all the draught it needed; the can of water that represented the boiler was in exactly the right place; the cane escape pipe was neatly fitted in. When steam was raised in the boiler it should have gone whistling merrily out the pipe, but

L'Un had declared, and was still declaring, that she would not blow. Aluin, with the kindly patience of his father, and the ready wit of his mother, set himself to find out why the whistle would not whistle.

The point at which the twins' ingenuity had failed them was the putting in of the whistle's plug. They had made it to blow in from the top instead of to blow up from the bottom.

Aluin, having found the error, went to work to right it, saying kindly:

"Engine don't blow whistle same like you blow it — comme-ça? Engine blow whistle up, you blow down."

He cut another cane and another plug, making the groove with care and fitting the parts together with great nicety. While he worked the twins hung over him, all eyes and interest. But though L'Autre's eyes, round and childlike, were on Aluin's strong, deft hands, L'Un's

eyes, alert and shrewd, were on Aluin's face, watching the set of it, the jaws that gripped, the brows that drew, watching with a wonder that quickened to comprehension until it broke in a glow of unquestioning admiration. When Aluin rose from his knees by the side of the shrilly whistling sugar mill he found L'Un's little black paw gravely offered for his grasp.

"All time," L'Un explained, "when I meet man I wish to shake hands wit' him. If I could be man like you, Godamit!"

The remark brought little L'Autre to a sharp remembrance of his manners. He tore his absorbed and delighted gaze from the whistling pipe and scrambled to his feet.

"T'ank you, Aluin," he said politely. "She blow fine, now." Then he dropped down on his knees again to watch and to admire.

L'Un looked into Aluin's eyes and shrugged a shoulder toward the unconscious blond head:

"He 's little chap," he explained kindly. "Mais he will be man some day."

Aluin held the little black hand hard for a minute, then dropped it and began to walk away again — seeing nothing. He had never had a little brother; he thought of that as he marched on steadily.

The result of that hand clasp was to throw L'Un into a fit of indignation, wild, unreasoning, vengeful.

"I will have her hang for das," he said in a hot whisper. "I will have her hang!"

L'Autre, absorbed in the joy of the sugar mill, heard only the shrill whistle that rang merrily on the evening air. He knew nothing of the resolutions L'Un was making, standing above him

there, with his hands clenched and his eyes blazing.

"Godamit, I will have her hang!"

And yet how could he hang Marie Micou? L'Un looked at his little brother's bent head. There was no help to be had there. L'Autre was only a little chap. He would probably cry if L'Un should call upon him to help with a hanging, even though it be the hanging of a girl who had hurt their sturdy champion. No, L'Autre could not help, but:

"I will have her hang for das," L'Un repeated. "Ha, she t'ink she can treat my friend like dog and live? Ha, me, I will show her how she can do das."

But Hérbert would not help him either. Hérbert had, and L'Un knew it, queer notions about girls, that they must never be hurt by boys, no matter what they did. L'Un did n't believe it. Girls, he believed, needed to be beaten sometimes; also, that there were times when they

needed to be hung. And how could he, unaided, hang Marie Micou.

"Oh, Godamit, why I did n't t'ink like das first time?" he cried. L'Autre looked up at the excited utterance, but L'Un had for his enlightening only a brief command:

"Arrêt, I run t'rough woods to see M. Moise. I be back before 't is dark."

As he dived into the bushes L'Un remembered something and shouted over his shoulder:

"Et, L'Autre! Keep heap water in das can. She will bust if she go dry."

Then he put out for the Moise front gallery.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE BITTER WORD

When L'Un reached the Moise front gallery, M. Moise was sitting there alone. Madame was still in the kitchen putting things in order after supper. Monsieur returned L'Un's greeting, invited him in, and turning, called through the house to his Madame:

"Bébé, L'Un ici." He supposed that the boy had been sent by his mother to borrow something, or to return something borrowed before.

L'Un corrected him promptly:

"Non, Monsieur. What I wish to say, 't is for man; 't is not for woman."

Madame Moise, however, was already on the gallery asking alertly:

"What 't is you wish, maybe, L'Un? Ha?"

L'Un stood up straight and told it:

"I wish to hang Marie Micou," he said. "I wish das M. Moise help me hang her. Me, I can't hang her wit'out help. And she should be hang'."

"Ma foi!" Madame uttered. "You crazy, maybe, ha, L'Un?"

"Mais non, I ain't crazy. Ha, das Marie she t'ink she can treat my friend like dog; but, me, I will show her how fine she can do like das. And you, Monsieur," he appealed, "you will help me, s'il vous plaît?"

Monsieur said "Sho, sho," not knowing that he said it. It seemed to him that every voice that spoke to him now, cried the name that hurt and baffled him. L'Un's delighted leap roused him; L'Un's shout of triumph made him remember. Where L'Un Paul was, there might be no dreaming.

"I wish to know, L'Un, for why 't is you will hang Marie Micou?" the big Monsieur asked slowly.

"She treat my friend like dog. I reckon, maybe, she t'ink my friend ain't got man to stand by him, but me, I will show her he has man to stand by him."

Madame Moise put in a quick word:

"I wish to know what friend das is she have treat so bad, maybe?"

L'Un's communication was, he felt, not for woman's ears, but since Madame pressed it, then she must hear. He turned upon her sharply:

"'T is Aluin. Godamit, she have said 'non' to him!"

"Oh, mais non!" Madame cried incredulously.

L'Un shrugged an indulgent shoulder. He had not expected a Madame to understand the situation.

Monsieur looked at the boy intently.

"L'Un," he said slowly, "you know das, maybe?"

"Mais oui, Monsieur. I know das. Ha, you t'ink I would lie to you?"

M. Moise said "Sho, sho," and began to consider it; but Madame flew in wildly:

"Marie have say 'non' to Aluin! Oh, L'Un, das can't be so. I wish to know for why you t'ink t'ing like das. You ain't *hear* her say das?"

"Non, Madame," L'Un admitted patiently. "I ain't hear her say 'non.'"

"Aluin ain't tell you, I know das, me," Madame declared.

L'Un looked at her hopelessly, then he turned to Monsieur:

"Yes," he said, "he have tell me. Not wit' his mouth, non. Godamit! when you see dog go limp on leg, you don't wait till das dog tell you wit' mouth das he is hurt in his leg, maybe?"

"Sho, sho," said Monsieur. "When

you see dog limp, den you know dog have hurt his leg. Yes, sir, I reckon, me, das is right. Right, sho!"

"Mais, cher —" Madame began.

L'Un put aside her womanish views with a gesture, and asked:

"And you will help me, like you say, Monsieur? You will help me hang das Marie Micou?"

M. Moise shook his head:

"Mais non, L'Un. I reckon, me, we can't do like das. 'T is for girl to say 'non' if she wish."

L'Un corrected him quickly:

"'T is for girl to say 'non' if she wish, oh, mais oui! But 't is not for girl to say 'non' to Aluin. Godamit, a girl would be fool to do like das. Das Marie Micou 's got no head. She should hang for das."

"Mais non, L'Un, she should not hang. No, sir, even if she say 'non' to Aluin. I know, me, Aluin is your

friend," M. Moise continued kindly, "and I know how 't is it make you mad to see your friend treat' so rough like das. Mais, 't is not for you, and 't is not for me, to hang Marie."

"Den for who 't is?" L'Un demanded.

"Das is what I don't know," Monsieur told him, and there was nothing in his steady tone to tell of the doubt like agony that lay behind. "Mais 't is for girl to say 'non' if she wish. And if girl say 'non' to man, man must take das. I reckon, me, Aluin is man enough to take 'non,' if girl say das to him."

"Mais oui, he is man enough," L'Un cried indignantly. "Godamit, dere ain't man on Bayou so fine like Aluin is!"

"Mais oui," Monsieur said gently. "'T is das how I t'ink aussi."

"And das Marie Micou, we can't do not'ing to her for das, no?"

"No," Monsieur said kindly. "We

can't do not'ing, L'Un. 'T is not even word we can say to her."

L'Un stood on the steps and looked away soberly into the deepening shadows. For a minute it would seem he almost doubted the wisdom of the big Monsieur, but in the end he accepted the verdict with a shrug of his lean shoulders:

"Eh bien, Monsieur. 'T is for you to know. 'T is for you to say. Me, I must go. I leave L'Autre in branch by himself and 't will be getting dark in dere, and he is scared for dark." He bowed to Monsieur and Madame and went down the steps, then turned to explain loyally:

"L'Autre, he is only little chap now, but he is going be man some day."

"Sho," Monsieur agreed. "He 's going be man, yes, sir."

"Oh, cher!" Madame appealed softly, "das can't be so." It was not L'Autre's latent possibilities that she doubted, as

M. Moise well knew. He turned sorrowfully.

"I reckon 't is so, Bébé," he said and his big voice broke pityingly.

"Mon Dieu! 't is going be hard for Aluin."

"Oh, cher," Madame whispered, "I don't know why Marie should say 'non' to *him*. I did n't t'ink dere was girl in world would say 'non' to *him*."

Monsieur sat forward in his chair, silent, his head bent over his big hands.

"Bébé," he said at last, "I believe he love das little stranger girl same like I love you — when you was laugh at me so much. If you had said 'non' to me! Mon Dieu! I don't believe, me, I could have stood for you to do like das."

"Mais, cher," Madame soothed eagerly, "I never t'ought to say 'non' to you. I would have been crazy, cher, to have said t'ing like das."

M. Moise lifted his head and looked at her:

"Bébé," he said, "dere ain't woman in world so fine like you." Then his heart went back to his boy, and his head bent again:

"I am sorry for Aluin. Mon Dieu! 't is going be tough for him. Tough, sho!"

"Cher," Madame whispered, "voilà Aluin."

M. Moise sat up instantly, tipped his chair back against the wall and began to roll a cigarette.

"Eh bien, Aluin," he greeted cheerfully. "You don't find dose steer, maybe?"

"Non, papa," Aluin answered, and sat down on the bottom steps as though he were tired. "I don't find dose steer. I go all up Bayou but I don't find steers. Don't find steers 't all."

"I reckon," M. Moise suggested

steadily, "dey go down Bayou, dose steer. 'T is way dey do. Mon Dieu! I have hunt' steer for fifty years and 't is way dey do. If you go up Bayou to hunt steer, den steers dey go down Bayou; if you go down, den dey go up. Yes, sir. Das is right. Dey go up, sho."

Monsieur had done his best and Madame realized it. She came to the rescue, asking brightly:

"And you hungry from your walk, ha, Aluin? Your supper, voilà 't is on table."

Aluin spoke without turning:

"Merci, mamma. I get some supper pretty soon."

"Bien, when you have rest' some," Madame agreed readily. She waited for Monsieur to take up the talk, but Monsieur was biting on his cigarette and looking at his boy's shoulders, so broad, yet so carelessly dropped together. If there was any talking to be done, Madame

Moise must do it, and, seeing that, she took up the task as bravely as may be and said again brightly:

"Have you hear, Aluin, das Madame Sam get her stove to-day? Mais oui! I see M. Santerre pass up road wit' stove in wagon. Oh, I reckon, me, Sara is proud to-night. 'T is t'irty years she have been wish for das stove and now she have it! Ma foi, I wish to know what will be next t'ing to happen on Bayou."

And Aluin, because it was breaking the boy heart of him, told her what would be the next thing to happen. Told her steadily enough but a bit wearily, too.

"I reckon, mamma," he said, "de next ti'ng das happen, 't will be Marie Micou make marry wit' Valère Dupré."

Monsieur dropped the front legs of his chair to the floor. Madame's astonishment escaped her in a scream:

"Make marry wit' Valère Dupré! Oh, Aluin, das *can't* be so!"

"'T is how she tell me," Aluin said.

"Mon Dieu!" Monsieur said slowly.

Madame said again, frantically:

"Das *can't* be so! Marie would be *crazy* to do t'ing like das. Oh, Aluin, das *can't* be so!"

Aluin stood up:

"'T is das how she tell me," he repeated. He stood looking away from them, big, boyish, heart-broken, but carrying his trouble without stumbling, as a man should.

Monsieur's hand opened and closed on Madame's, and Madame fought back the sobs, and silenced the words that were yearning to wail over her boy as though he had been but a baby.

"Your supper is on table, Aluin," she said, and her tone tried to tell all that her tongue might not put in words. "Your supper is on table, cher."

"Merci, mamma," Aluin said, and walked away, around the house.

"I can't t'ink, cher," Madame said helplessly to Monsieur when she was sure they were alone. "I can't t'ink!"

"And me eit'er, Bébé," M. Moise told her solemnly. "Valère will have nice place dere. When his papa die 't will be all for him — "

"Oh, cher, I don't believe dere is any girl in world would marry him for place he will have. I don't believe Marie Micou will do das!"

"If," Monsieur said deliberately, — "if I knew for why she wash her hands so much."

"Cher," Madame said earnestly, "me, I ain't said word to Marie. Not un mot seul." She waited. Monsieur said nothing. "And you, cher?"

"Non," Monsieur answered. "And me, eit'er. I ain't said word to her."

There seemed to be no other solution. If the present could not account for Marie Micou's inexplicable conduct —

then the past must. But their boy; their Aluin! That a fool should be preferred before him! How could they bear it?

And even while they questioned mutely, while father love and mother love beat through all their being, and every beat a throb of yearning, Monsieur and his Madame must put their pain aside, and rise and give courteous greeting to the friend who came so ruthlessly upon their sorrow. For M. Reneau had left his pony at the gate and was striding up the walk. Not that M. Reneau was in any mood to sympathize now with the heartache of a comrade. M. Reneau was mad!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE DAY OF DISCOVERY

"Bon soir, Madame! Damné, Moise, maybe we ain't been fool, ha?" M. Reneau caught Madame's right hand and bowed over it in a whirl, then he flung himself down in a chair on the other side of the big Monsieur and let fly another "Damné!" that went through the air like a saw through wood. "We ain't been fool, no!"

"Sho, sho," said M. Moise.

"But yes, 't is sho," Reneau cried hotly. "You know das Camusette? Das dago? Damné, he ain't buy das place, no! He just come squat!"

"Come squat!" M. Moise repeated, yet he did not seem to be surprised.

"Mais oui, he come squat. He ain't buy das land. And you and me, we go

make fence — t'ree hundred feet of fence for him! Mais oui, he squat! Das lawyer from Black Bayou! Das Mister Lotter — "

"He is agent for das American," M. Moise put in deliberately. It was a remark he never failed to make whenever Lotter's name was mentioned. M. Reneau recognized the remark now with an impatient:

"My God, Moise!" and rushed on with his story:

"Every time he come to Bienvieu, das lawyer, he ask me for why I don't buy das place he is agent for. And to-day aussi, I come up on gallery — down to store — and voilà, he was dere, talk wit' Bat, and he say to me again: 'Ha, M. Reneau, for why you don't buy das little piece of land by your place?' And me, I laugh. I say: 'Eh, bien, Mister Lotter, you beat me bad dis time. Beat me bad, sho.' Well, he turn round from

where he was talk' wit' Bat, he look, he say: 'Mais non, I ain't been beat' you, M. Reneau.' And he say: 'I wish to know how 't is I been beat' you, maybe?' And me, I laugh some more and I say: 'Oh, mais non, you ain't beat me! Maybe 't is you ain't been sell' das nice little piece of land to not'er man.' And he look, look me sharp, yes. 'Not'er man, not'ing,' he say. ''T is to you I 'm going sell das piece of land.' And me, I say: 'Eh, bien, 't is not'er man have das land now. If 't is not you das sell it him, den, me, I don't know who 't is.' He look sharp some more, and he say sharp: 'And, me, I don't know who 't is neit'er.' And he say: 'I wish to know who das man is das buy land, maybe?' Well, me, I tell him man's name is Clausel Camusette. And I tell him 't is about two mont's he has been live yonder. And das lawyer, he look me some more; he look Bat, and he say

slow like: 'Well, I 'll be damned!' Den he ask me if I can give him ride over yonder, and I tell him oui — certainly, I tell him oui! Mister Lotter get in wagon wit' me. We drive. We come to place. Voilà Camusette sit' on log in front of house! Mister Lotter, he holler: 'Hello!' And he say, 'Who live here now?' Camusette don't say not'ing. We get out wagon. We go in. Me, I introduce" — and M. Reneau waved his hand to show how he did it — "lawyer to Camusette. And den lawyer begin to talk. My God, Moise! Das man can *talk*. He don't talk so much, no; but dose word he say, dey go t'rough t'ing like sharp axe. Camusette he won't say not'ing. Just sit look yonder like he ain't got ears. So lawyer pull paper on him. Tell him look, 't is power 'torney. Pardieu! when Camusette see das power 'torney he find his tongue, yes. He say non, he ain't buy das place. Say he

ain't never tell nobody he buy place. Say he don't have not'ing to do wit' das fence. Say 't is some men come and build fence. Say he just come camp dere while — he 's going move on in two t'ree days. So lawyer he say all right, and he tell him sharp like he will be back again in t'ree days to see if he have moved. And den we drive back to store. Ha, maybe you t'ink das lawyer don't get gay wit' me. He slap his leg. He laugh. He ask me what for I was in so much hurry to make fence for man das just come squat. And he say: 'Ha, Mister Reneau, you let das little dago run away wit' you.' And he ask me how many rails I split for das fence maybe. And he say: 'I bet my head Mister Moise split rails too.' And he laugh till he choke. Pardieu, he make me mad, Moise! 'T is fifty years since you and me play fool so much like das."

"Sho, sho," said M. Moise, deliber-

ately. "Well, I reckon, Victor, if we have play fool, we have play fool, maybe."

Reneau could not gainsay it, and the two Messieurs sat soberly and looked at the bake-oven in the lane. Not because there was anything of interest in the bake-oven. It was just such a burnt clay structure as stood in all the lanes, a great shelf of turtle-like shape, turned down on a platform that stood four feet from the ground. The mouth of the oven was toward the house but the dark hole of its opening could not be distinguished now in the gloom. What could be distinguished was the pile of bake-oven woods, finely split and neatly stacked, all ready for the next baking day. And when Monsieur's eyes had taken in consciousness of the wood he moved with a twist of pain, remembering Aluin, who had split and stacked it there. He spoke again almost restlessly:

"I wish to know what lawyer is doing on Bayou, maybe?"

"He come for fix paper for Auguste Dupré." Reneau's answer was curt, for his anger still held him. "'T is how he tell me. Dupré is sick and wish to have paper fix for him."

"Dupré is sick?" M. Moise repeated with concern. "I ain't hear he was sick."

M. Reneau shrugged his shoulder:

"Me eit'er. I see him yesterday. He was look all right — right as he can look. When you see a man wit' pretty face like girl —" M. Reneau shrugged again.

"Sho, sho," M. Moise said, and considered it.

"Dupré is young," he said at length. "Young for have paper fix. I don't believe, me, he make his t'irty-six year yet."

"No, he ain't make it," M. Reneau told him briefly. "Mais you know how 't is wit' dose Duprés, 'live to-day, dead

to-morrow. I reckon 't is das why he wish to have paper fix. Dey die young, dose Dupré."

"I wish to know if Dupré is much sick," M. Moise said kindly.

"My Madame go dere wit' me when I tell her what lawyer say. She say maybe he want some bread cook — some gumbo, maybe. She 's kind, Amelia is. But das Dupré, he don't let her do not'-ing. Say 'Merci,' and 'Merci'; and say Valère do for him so fine. He ain't got much sense, Dupré ain't. When you see man wit' pretty face like girl — " The magnate roused sharply from his passionate preoccupation:

"Moise! If Dupré *should* die, you reckon das Valère going know how to take care of what he leave him, ha? Das Valère! he ain't got no head!"

M. Moise did not even say "sho." He had not heard the poignant question. At the mention of Valère's name his heart

and thought had gone all to his baffled boy. He said nothing; but Madame, his wife, had Reneau blood in her — proud blood! — and she said briskly:

"Eh bien, M. Reneau! Maybe 't is Valère will make marry wit' girl das have head and — "

"Mais, *Madame!*" the magnate interrupted, and then added in courteous excuse of his abruptness:

"I don't reckon, Madame, dere is girl in world would make marry wit' boy like Valère. Ha, Moise?"

"If," Monsieur told him with deliberation, — "if girl should wish for home, Valère will have right nice place — "

But the magnate broke in with decision:

"My God, no!"

Monsieur said "sho, sho," and looked away into the dusk to consider it, and to consider that "Why to Reneau's house?" But he made slow work of it.

The magnate had long since made his bon soirs, when M. Moise asked thoughtfully:

"Bébé, what name 't is das banana man have?"

"Das run wit' M. Reneau's little sister, cher? 'T was Pavoli — Tomaso Pavoli."

Monsieur sighed: "Eh bien!" Then he added as though for once he spoke without reason:

"I 'm sorry for Reneau."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE MESSAGE TO M. MOISE

THE time had come for Auguste Dupré to die, and Auguste Dupré knew it. In the middle of the big white bed Valère had spread for him with such care, Dupré lay and watched his boy wobble about the house, all eagerness to do for his sick papa. Not that Dupré looked ill. The prettiness that the magnate had mentioned with such bitter disdain was all there untouched, unfaded. The delicate color blushed through the sunburn of his cheek with even a deeper hue, the red lips were as red, the fine black hair as softly curled as ever. But Dupré was dying, and he knew it. From under their long lashes his beautiful eyes followed Valère wistfully as he worked, —

now industriously wiping a footprint from the spotless floor; now stooping to peer into the pot where the tea was brewing; now mending the fire with a careful hand, — so busy was Valère, struggling with his wretched leg, smiling, eager to do. Dupré felt the paper the lawyer had fixed for him. It was all safe under his pillow. In that paper Valère was made heir to cattle, sheep, and swine; to farm and timber land. But it was stipulated that he should turn over to M. Moise every year two cows, two lambs, and two pigs to pay him for helping him take care of his possessions. Also, two acres of the farm were to be cultivated for the profit of M. Moise.

Yes, it was all fixed in the paper. But one thing the paper had not been able to cover, and it was of this M. Dupré thought as he watched his busy boy. He would die pretty soon. Die

as all the Duprés had died since the grandfathers began to be second cousin to the grandsons — the blood running thinner, the heads growing smaller, and the hearts getting weaker as the generations passed. Son after father the Duprés had died, with hearts hammering them like mad one minute, to be still as a stone the next. He, Auguste Dupré, was going to die that way also — pretty soon. He knew it as dogs know when they creep away from their kind to be alone with their last agony. And what would Valère do?

Eh bien, that was the trouble that made M. Dupré follow with wistful eyes every uncouth motion and eager effort. What would Valère do when he came to his father and found that father still and silent, and not to be roused by pleadings? — Valère, who knew nothing of death, — had never seen either dead or dying! He would be frightened, terri-

bly frightened, — and the scare might kill him, with his weak heart and his weaker head.

M. Dupré, dying, and a little glad to be rid of his own blighted life, yet stopped on the eve of his release to take all thought that might guard his son from a like escape. M. Dupré loved his boy.

And so, watching with loving looks from under his long lashes, thinking, pondering, M. Dupré at last knew what he must do, and called to the busy Valère:

"Mon fils?"

"Me voici, papa," Valère answered.

"Vien," the father commanded.

Valère came at once and as quickly as he could, and stood looking down upon the pretty papa he so idolized.

"I t'ink, me, I 'm going go to sleep, Valère," M. Dupré told him gently. "T'ink I am going go to sleep tight,

so tight you can't make me wake up. I don't wish das you wake me up."

"Mais non, papa," Valère agreed readily.

"I don't wish das you be scared. I wish das you take your hat and go up Bayou to M. Moise and tell him how 't is your papa have gone to sleep so tight he won't wake up. I know, me, you can tell dose words to M. Moise. I know dere ain't boy on Bayou can go to M. Moise and tell him das so fine like you can, ha, mon fils?"

"Mais oui, papa," Valère cried in glee. "When you go to sleep — tight — me, I will go to M. Moise and tell him you sleep tight." And in his eagerness to prove how finely he could do all this, Valère would have hurried matters a bit. He asked eagerly:

"'T is now you going go to sleep all tight, papa?"

"Pretty soon, I go, garçon."

Valère sat down on the side of the bed and watched patiently for those beautiful eyes to close in a sleep all tight and lasting, but the eyes stayed open.

The room grew darker as the sun dropped over to the other side of the house, but even then, though he could not be sure because of the blackness of their lashes, whether the eyes were open or not, even then Valère knew that his papa was not asleep, because M. Dupré was lying stretched straight out in the bed. A man could not sleep all straight, Valère knew that, because when he, Valère, slept, it was on his side, with his hands cuddled between his knees. But, yes; Valère slept as all men had slept in the beginning, as some monkeys sleep now.

The sun dropped lower and lower down the western side until it found a knot-hole in the wall of the house and sent a long, red beam to light up the

hair of the dying man. The fine black curls shone like silk in the glow, and the sight of it made Valère remember.

"Papa?" he questioned quickly.

"Mon fils."

"'T is yesterday Marie Micou let me pet hair wit' her. 'T was all soft, papa, soft like sheep."

M. Dupré rose sharply to his elbow:

"Marie Micou!"

"Mais, oui," Valère chuckled, pleased to have surprised his father.

M. Dupré did not look pleased — he looked aghast.

"Marie Micou," he repeated, then he asked:

"How come she let you pet hair wit' her. She is for Aluin Moise."

"For Aluin," Valère scoffed. "Dog-gone, you do just like one fool! Marie Micou is for me."

"For you! Oh, mon fils! Mon fils!" M. Dupré sank back from his elbow.

"Mais oui, she is for me — all time," Valère told in triumph.

M. Dupré did not answer. His breath broke harshly; his head jerked backward; then he writhed over on his side, and his clenched hands went down to be caught between his knees.

Valère stood up. But, yes. His papa was asleep now, all tight. He bent over to make sure of it, and it was for him, Valère, to show how fine he could go and tell M. Moise.

Valère got his hat just as his papa had told him to do, and pulled it down hard over his ears to keep the message from getting away. Then he shut the house door carefully, as his father had taught him also to do, and struggled down the steps and out into the sunshine.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was well up above the pine trees, but every now and then there ran

through the air swift, cool ripples that made one think of night hawks and stars. Valère knew what that meant; it was getting late and he must hurry, hurry, to carry his message to M. Moise. He smiled proudly as he struggled on. It was fine to feel that he was doing something better than any boy on the Bayou could do it, and Valère flung out his arms and twisted his mouth in the effort to carry his message better and faster.

The Moise place was two miles or more from the Dupré farm. A long way for Valère's legs to travel, and yet by six o'clock his industry and perseverance and pride in his mission had covered nearly the whole of that weary way.

Eh bien, some one else was also hurrying along the Bayou road that afternoon, — hurrying not in pride and eagerness, but with a heart full of half-crazy hopes and fears. Marie Micou had

been sent upon another errand and was speeding home from the doing of it — traveling the public road because glades and thickets held memories for her now that she dared not face. As she hurried her eyes kept sharp lookout for Aluin.

"If I see him, me," she panted.

Ah, if she should see him! See the good, slow smile, the slow, kind glance — If she should ever see the big, gentle fellow again, could she tell him another time that she was going to walk with Valère — and face the hurt and horror in his eyes?

"Oh, I pray God, me, I won't ever see him again!" And as she neared the Moise place Marie grew so vigilant for fear of the one boy in the world, that she would have sped past Valère without seeing him if he had not hailed her in glee, crying:

"Voilà! My papa, he 's gone to sleep!

Gone tight, yes. And, me, I go for tell M. Moise. 'T is like my papa say. Dere ain't boy on Bayou can go tell M. Moise so fine like me. 'T is my *papa* say das." — He was very proud of it, poor fellow!

Marie's hurrying steps checked their hurrying, her eyes went wide and deep with pity.

"And your papa," she asked gently, "he — sleeps?"

"Mais oui, he sleep tight."

"How long it is he sleep like das?" Marie questioned fearfully.

Valère motioned to the sun.

"He was yonder," he said, and then he looked alarmed. "And now he is *dere*. Me, I must hurry! You will go wit' me?" he asked wistfully. "'T will make me proud."

Marie was looking at him out of dimming eyes. Her own father was asleep — it was a long time since he had gone to sleep so tightly that he could not be

wakened. Marie had stood on tiptoe by the bedside to peep at his fast sleeping. She could not remember when her mother had gone to sleep; she had been too little then even to peep at sleeping.

"Mais oui," she said gently, "me, I can go wit' you t'rough lane. I can't go to house; it is das I must hurry. But I can go wit' you t'rough lane," and she reflected:

"If I see him dere, I can jump fence and run t'rough field. Das cane is so high."

"Das make me proud," Valère declared, and he began mouthing horribly in an effort to walk even more proudly than before.

They fared on together, — she such a beautiful girl, he such a wretched image of a man. The pines stooped over them, sighing; the long-stemmed wild flowers bowed their yellow heads. Valère strained his whole being to the

task of keeping his balance, throwing out his long arms, swaying, twisting his lips and fingers. Marie watched him, thinking of his sleeping father; of him; of herself; of — but no, she must not think of a face going white under her words, lying words; of a voice breaking in a horrified "Quoi!"

"Ferme," she said to her clamoring tenderness. "He is for Félicie."

The silent, slowly moving pair reached the Moise lane and turned into it. On one side was a field of tall cane ready for the knife; on the other, bare, plowed ground, where the potatoes had been harvested. Through the lane the sun shone redly from the west. Marie's shrinking, seeking eyes followed up that line of crimson light to the big tree where Monsieur's wagon stood with the ox-yokes leaned against it, to the shed where Madame's bake-oven was flanked by its stack of neatly-piled wood —

Marie's eyes lingered on that wood. It was Valère who saw farther up the lane, and Valère who croaked forth the question touching what he saw:

"Who das is come yonder?"

Marie's eyes went forward to see. To see a figure broad and brave advancing with the swift approach of strength and youth? But no. What she saw was the figure of an old man bent under a bundle. For an instant she looked in stupid disappointment, then, with the cry of a cornered creature, she sprang over the fence and fled away into the heart of M. Moise's cane field. How many times as she lay beside Félicie and thought of ugly shadows had she planned against this, saying, "All time I will watch. If I see him, me, I will jump; I will run. He won't have chance, no, for see me."

Eh bien, she had jumped, she was running, but the second she had taken to clear her eyes of visions, that second

had given the peering eyes of Clausel Camusette all the time they needed. He dropped both bundle and stick and started down the lane to overtake the running girl. An easy thing to do, he thought, for a man can quickly wind a girl. And an easy thing it would have been had he not had Valère Dupré to reckon with.

Valère had seen Marie's terror and retreat; he saw Camusette's rage and rush; then he saw Madame's pile of neatly-stacked bake-oven wood; and with a howl Valère went into action. So did the wood. Fast as stick could fly after stick that wood flew to meet the oncoming Camusette; flew into him, over him, under him. A whirl of wood. And with the wood, mingling with it, magnifying it, came inarticulate cries of anger and uncouth grimaces of rage. Camusette stopped, but only for the moment. In checking he had caught sight of a gate that gave on the lane. Furiously,

he dodged through it into a yard, and found himself in the presence of the two Messieurs, who, with chairs tipped back against the shady side of the house, were calmly smoking corn-shuck cigarettes.

M. Moise did not put out a hand to stop him, but he looked at Camusette with the surprise of a house-owner who finds his home rudely intruded upon, and Camusette came to a stand.

"Bon jour," M. Moise said then, courteously.

For response, Camusette burst out upon him with all the bitterness of a baffled pursuit:

"Sacré bleu! Why you don't make fool yonder stop t'row das wood?"

M. Reneau looked into M. Moise's eyes; then he got up and walked to the corner of the house where a view of the lane showed Valère filling the air with cries and grimaces and sticks of neatly split wood.

"Ha, Valère!" he shouted. "C'est bien! Arrêtez! Vien ici!"

Having reduced Valère to order, the magnate came back to the shade of the house, but he did not resume his seat. Tremendously tall he looked as he stood leaning beside his solid friend, eyeing the man who had brought down the lawyer's laughter upon their heads.

M. Moise had sat silently through it all with his eyes on Camusette. Very kind, almost gentle, the big Monsieur looked as he sat there in the sweet, cool shade of the house he had built with his own young hands long years ago. Very kind, yes, but when Camusette made a quick move to continue the pursuit through his cane field, M. Moise said, "Arrêtez," and Camusette waited, biting his lips and clenching his hands until Valère came swaying and gibbering to the edge of the shade.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE FLIGHT

When Valère had come to a stand, M. Moise turned to Camusette and said politely:

"And what 't is wit' you and Valère, maybe, M. Camusette?"

Camusette stated his case shortly:

"Me," he said, "I wish to pass t'rough lane and das fool yonder t'row wood at me. Sacré bleu, he t'row wood like hell!"

The big Monsieur said "Sho, sho," then his glance went kindly to the scared and shaken Valère.

"Eh bien, Valère," he said gently, "I am glad, me, you t'row wood! Mon Dieu! dere ain't boy on Bayou can t'row wood so fine like you. And for what 't is you t'row wood, maybe?"

Valère, rallied by the hearty praise, stopped his senseless chatter, and pointed a curved forefinger at Camusette:

"He was run for Marie Micou," he cried.

The Monsieur's big head swung around to Camusette:

"And for why 't is you wish to run for Marie Micou, maybe?"

Camusette stood for a moment as though he had resolved to entrench himself in his wonted silence, then thought better of it and said sullenly:

"I wish to talk wit' her."

"And what 't is you wish to say to her, maybe?" Monsieur asked.

"'T is for me to know."

M. Moise shook his head in slow dissent:

"If, M. Camusette," he said weightily, "if you had go to house where little girl live and talk wit' her dere, den it would be for you to know what 't is you

wish to say to her. But if you come make chase wit' little girl in my cane, den 't is for me to know what 't is you wish to say to her."

Camusette fell back upon his grim brevity and said:

"I wish to say her bon jour. I come from place where she live."

"Sho," said Monsieur, "sho." Then his eyebrows went up in patient protest. "Mais if she run so much seem like she don't wish das you say her bon jour. And dere ain't nobody going say her das if she don't wish — not while she stay on Bayou dere ain't."

Camusette came out of his grimness with a fling of fury:

"And who 't is will say I can't say to her what I wish?" he shouted.

A little humor came into M. Moise's quiet glance as he answered:

"Eh bien, Monsieur. I reckon maybe 't is me say das."

Camusette, like a creature at bay, looked at the big man before him.

"Grand Dieu! 'T is you. Yes, 't is you. You know what 't is das girl do? She steal — steal boy from my girl. Dey was betrot'ed. Dey was happy. Das Marie come look, come smile. Boy go sit on gallery wit' her and everybody have laugh — but my girl don't sit still for laugh, no! she take gun and wait by bushes till boy come, den she shoot — Ha! 't is right she should shoot. Mais oui, and if das boy die, den maybe 't is she shall hang for das, — 't is not my girl shall hang, — 't is not her shall hang! I go to aunt and say, 'Das Marie you got in house — she steal — she is meurtrière.' Madame cry, 'Oh, mais non! Marie is nice little t'ing — she will not do so bad like das!' I tell her, 'Oui, she will do,' — den she say, 'Voilà, she ain't in house wit' me,' and I say to sheriff, me, 'For why you don't hang das girl das

steal boy from my girl? If she ain't steal — my girl ain't shoot!' He laugh —laugh like fool. So, me, I make swear 't is me will catch das Marie, — 't is me will — "

For once M. Moise interrupted a man in his speech. He brought his chair down on four legs and said slowly, " Mais non, Monsieur," and then without pausing to consider, he added:

" Steal boy! Das ain't not'ing — Dere ain't law for hang girl for steal boy. No, sir, if girl have boy, and 'not'er girl wish to steal boy, girl should keep boy if she can. If she can't keep 'not'er girl from steal, she can't do not'ing — and she can't say not'ing. Das is law!"

Camusette turned savagely: " Not'-ing! Ain't not'ing — to steal boy from my girl? I will show her, me."

" Das boy, he ain't dead, no? " queried M. Moise, courteously.

"How you know he ain't dead, ha? Ain't my girl shoot him? — ain't he fall in the road? And das Marie, she come — come from long way — and lift him up — and her hands dey was red — red, yes, wit' de blood dat runs. Grand Dieu! I tell her, me, das on her hands das blood is! I say to her, 'You is meurtrière — you — you — and you shall hang for das!' And you say he ain't dead, ha?"

M. Moise was himself again, deliberate, gentle; he made his reasoning plain to the raging dago. "If das boy was dead, M. Camusette, and it was Marie das shoot, yes, das governor you have yonder would send man to fetch Marie. If man shoot man in one state and den run to 'not'er state, sheriff can't do not'ing to him till governor get paper for him to do. And if das man he shoot don't die, governor can't get paper. Yes, sir, das is law. And de people in state

where he run can't do not'ing to him till dey have paper. As law is for man, so 't is for girl. And you — you ain't got paper, Monsieur, and you can't do not'ing to little girl das run when she see you. No, sir, you can't do not'ing — das is law!"

"Das is law! Sacré bleu! you t'ink you goin' to make fool of me some more, ha!"

"Excusez-moi, M. Camusette," replied Monsieur placidly. "I ain't never make fool of you."

"Oh, mais non, you ain't make fool! 'T is not you das tell me dere ain't nobody come run to Victor Reneau's house?"

M. Moise explained gently:

"Mais oui, Monsieur, when you ask me if anybody have come run to Reneau's house, I tell you 'non.' Mais, you ain't never ask me if somebody have come run to Bayou."

"Cher," uttered a voice from within the house. It was Madame Moise. At that deliberate distinction there had flashed before her a vision of the past unhappy month, and in it she had seen her big Monsieur sitting sorrowfully but solidly between the homeless little stranger and this ugly old man with the mean eyes.

M. Moise heard the exclamation, but M. Reneau did not. He had turned upon Camusette with a harsh question:

"And for why she should come run to my house — das Marie Micou?"

The dago flung both hands above his head and shook them — the fingers vibrant with his fury:

"Oh, Grand Dieu! Micou! Das girl ain't no Micou. 'T is Marie Reneau Pavoli she is and she is t'ief — meurtrière —"

The magnate sprang erect, his power-

ful fist clenching as his arm swung into line.

But M. Moise also rose.

"Reste tranquille, Victor," he said, and to the dago:

"No, M. Camusette, I ain't never tell you lie. Mais, Monsieur, I wish to say to you, *me,* 't is not for *man* to come sneak on girl's track. 'T is for *dog* to do das."

It was a direct challenge, directly given, but before the dago could make reply to it — if he dared reply — Valère, terrified and alone at the corner of the house, caught sight of comfort and hailed it hysterically:

"Aluin, Aluin! Doggone you do just like one fool. For why you don't run? Marie Micou run. She see man yonder, she jump fence, she run, — she run! Me, I ain't got some legs. I can't run. For why you don't run? For why you stand dere look, look? Doggone, you do just like one fool!"

Aluin walked up to the dago and said:

"What 't is you been do to Marie Micou?"

"Micou, Grand Dieu! 'T is what she have been do to me. She steal — she is t'ief —"

"A toi," Aluin warned briefly.

The dago threw up an arm to guard, but as well might he have set up a straw stack to stop a stampeded steer. Aluin's blow went home, and jumping over the dago as he fell, Aluin ran on to the cane field, following the direction Valère had pointed out to him.

"If I can find her track in dere — If I can do like das —"

But Valère had no legs to run with, and the dago in falling struck his temple against one of the stakes that protected Madame's flower beds, and out of the gash a thin red stream sprang to patter

in the dust at Valère's feet. Valère had no legs to run with. But for the first time in his unthinking life he thought of death — saw human blood and smelled it — and the thought and sight spurred him to a desperate haste — to go anywhere — to get away — to hide himself from that sight, and that cruel, soapy smell. Struggling wildly in his panic, he reached the gate. And the excited group around the fallen man took no notice of his going.

For Valère there was nothing left to be noticed or known save the pattering of the thin red stream that pursued him like an echo, save the sickening, soapy smell that made the air thick with the thought of death.

The sunset glow faded to gray during that flight; the dusk deepened; the frogs began to croak lonesomely in the late October stillness. Barefooted, hatless, Valère struggled on, swinging his long

arms wildly in the desperate effort to hasten his stumbling steps; looking back fearfully, his weazen face gleaming pale and set in the failing light — looking back, fearing to see, and always seeing that thin red stream spinning on his track. Valère's nostrils opened and shut, quivering with the sickening smell of it, and faster and faster his frightened heart hammered him as he fled for safety to his hiding place in the swamp.

When Valère reached his log at last it was to fall beside it, spent and panting, with his face up to the night sky, listening, watching like a hunted beast.

Minute by minute the night grew deeper. Over that far horizon where the pine tops fringed into the sky, bright eyes pried and peeped at Valère, and voices unheard of human ears called him, claimed him. Here he was at home, safe from all human things. The bass of the bullfrog, the shrill pipe of the tree toad,

the owl with its shriek and chuckle, were all as they had been many times before; but still Valère's heart pounded; and still that sweat of terror rolled down his bony, misshapen face. Wherever he looked, up at the stars, out into the black swamp, away to the magical sky-line, everywhere that thin red stream was spinning through the night to patter at his feet; and always the smell of it, rank and cruel, was in his nostrils, banishing forever the soothing fragrance of rotting leaves and marshy ground. Forgotten now was the message to M. Moise he had started out so proudly to deliver; forgotten the pretty father who slept so soundly; forgotten the soft, curly hair that was to have been his to pet. And, eh bien! forgotten at last was the stream of spinning red, and there was left only the terror of his hammering heart, going faster and faster, till it ran up like a flutter in his ears and then —

And then Valère had died like the Dupré that he was; like the grandson of his second cousin; like the first cousin of his father. Died with only the frog to croak a requiem, and the owl to make lament!

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE ANSWER

THE dago's fall had been marked by a cry from Madame, a quick movement of the magnate and silence from M. Moise.

"Arrêtez, Victor! Where 't is you would go, maybe?"

"Go," uttered the magnate, half way to his horse with his head up, "go! My God, Moise! I would go to my little girl das run yonder. My little Marie! My sister's little girl! My —"

M. Moise checked impatience with a slow shake of the head.

"Mais," he said, "I don't know if you can go like das. To go to little girl das run yonder, das job is for Aluin. And voilà, he have gone!"

Aluin, clinging to the vague clew Valère's pointing finger had given him, was not thinking of what he had left behind him. Running, and stooping low as he ran, he followed the fence until he came to the place where Marie had jumped over, and there he caught the trail he was seeking; running and stooping he followed the trail he had caught. Not so easy to do there in the field where the cane cast its shadow on the footprint that was sometimes but a pressure on the grass — but a blur in the furrow. Once clear of the field and out on the big road the trail was clearer, and Aluin could follow faster, seeing but one footprint among the many that marked the sand of the slopes and the mud of the hollows.

"Pauvre petite," Aluin said from time to time, his lips parting dryly over the words, — "Pauvre petite."

In the air above him were thoughts of

the boy she had stolen — and of Valère. But under his eyes was the print of a flying foot that looked so small and lonesome among the many mingling tracks.

"Pauvre petite!" Running alone ahead there — and running so fast!

A mile and another mile, and the light was failing, the night dropping down.

"Mon Dieu! why she don't get tired?" 'Aluin cried in sharp anxiety. But always the footprint was faint in the sliding sand; and in the mud, half washed away by oozing water. If Aluin was gaining in his pursuit he could not perceive it, and the light was going out in long, shaky shadows that the twilight wind sighed over as it passed.

"Why she don't get tired! Little t'ing like das, to run so much!" For the first time since he had cleared the cane field Aluin raised his eyes from the trail he followed. And with the raising of his eyes he saw help. Saw one of Reneau's

little wood ponies, a docile little beast trained to come at a call and run at the pressure of a knee:

"Cheval!" Aluin shouted joyously.

The pony came to meet him, stooping a knowing little head. Aluin hung over the pony's withers, watching the racing road while his knee urged the pony to its best spurt of speed.

"C'est bien," he said once, and "C'est vrai," he said again, and pressed his knee harder to the pony's rib. For he was gaining now. The sand seemed to be but just sliding back into the footprint, the water had not yet oozed into that mark in the mud. And then there were no more footprints in either sand or mud, nor any pressure on the wayside grass!

The pony turned at a slap on its neck and trotted back slowly, knowing as well as Aluin knew that a trail had been lost and must be picked up again. Back and

forth the pony trotted, with pricked ears, listening, until Aluin said aloud:

"She 's yonder," and slid off to follow his searching glance through the crowding growth of the thicket.

It was darker in the thicket than in the open, but in the gloom, dimly outlined, stood a figure, very slim, very small, planted pluckily with its back against a tree.

"Aluin," said a panting breath.

Aluin pressed on, until he had but to put forth his hand to touch her, and then the thoughts that had been above him, around him, unheeded in the hot pursuit, settled down upon him — closed him in.

His arms swung up slowly and folded over his broad breast, his feet planted, his head settled solidly — like poetry of power each measured motion told its story, and when the question came it was well served and steady:

"Das boy you steal? You have kiss him? Yes?"

Marie's lowered eyes lifted with a flash. She might be a meurtrière but she was a well-brought-up 'Cajan girl, and not even Aluin Moise should accuse her of an indecorum.

"Non," she said hotly, "I never wear ring wit' das boy, me." Aluin felt his question answered; no correct 'Cajan girl would kiss a boy to whom she was not betrothed. But Aluin had yet another question to ask. The question came, but not well served and steadily, no! Slinking in its tracks like a whipped-on thing:

"And Valère Dupré, you have kiss him — maybe?"

Marie's answer was a shudder and a cry:

"Oh, mais non!"

Aluin's arm closed around the shuddering shoulders:

"Mais, you going kiss me, Marie?"

Marie drew back from his stooping lips.

"Non," she declared. "I 'm not going kiss you. I 'm not going kiss any boy 't all."

Aluin pulled out the ring he had been carrying in his pocket for a month:

"Voilà, you wear ring wit' me, den you will kiss me, oui?" he coaxed.

"Mais non," Marie told him, "I will not wear ring wit' you! My hand, it is not clean!"

Aluin took her hand while she denied him and put his ring where he wanted it to be:

"Now kiss me, Marie."

But Marie would not; rushing instead into a recital of the wrong-doing that made her a fugitive — a child of fear:

"My papa and my mamma dey die when I was little like das," she cried.

"Me, I live wit' my aunt. She have girls das is more big dan me, and all time dey laugh — dey call me beggar. But me, I get Sister to teach me to sew, I t'ink maybe 't is dey will quit call me beggar if I can make de money. So I learn fine, and my aunt say: 'Eh bien, Marie will sew, you will cook and wash.' But dey laugh at me some more — dey call me old maid! Dey say, 'For why you don't have boy come sit on gallery wit' you?' Dey call me pauvre vielle fille, dey sing at me: 'Sit on gallery and sew all time by yourself, Marie.' And das make me mad. I tell dem, 'Ferme,' and I say 'dere ain't boy on island won't sit on gallery wit' me if I wish.' And dey laugh heap and say, 'Voilà Claudis, das go to see de only girl das rich man got, you reckon he will sit on gallery wit' you, maybe?' And I say, 'Oui, if I wish he will sit.' And dey say, 'Ha, das girl's papa is dago, he sell banana, he make de

money all time. He is rich man, and also he is old man. When he die his girl 's going have all he 's got. You t'ink Claudis ain't know? You reckon he going to leave das girl for come sit wit' you?' I tell dem, 'Oui, he will do.' And 't is one week he is sit on gallery wit' me. I hear, me, das dago's girl look like she is worry some — look like she is mad heap. But, me, I don't care. My cousin had quit das laugh — das sing; dey talk me soft — and I was proud. Den one night das girl's papa he meet me in road, and he tell me his girl have shoot boy, and 't is me shall hang for das. And I was scare — but I run to help — I lift him up, and my hands," — she held them towards him — "dey was red — red, and me I run' — "

Aluin broke in impatiently:

"Mais oui, m' amie, you run to me."

"Non, I don't not run to you, I run to my uncle — to save my neck

from rope. Den Félicie say to me, 'M. Reneau is proud man,' and I was scare."

"Bébé," Aluin pleaded, his lips leaning nearer.

Marie caught a girlish breath and drew back:

"I will not kiss you. Non! Jamais, jamais plus!"

Aluin's arm closed with a more convincing clasp as he bent to look into her eyes.

"Marie," he asked gently, "it is das you don't love me 't all?"

Did not love him? How could she tell him that? Marie's lips parted obediently to her will, but her tongue stayed still. Did not love him? Outside of this strong arm that guarded her, what did the world hold for Marie? Only the stars looking down lonesomely; the night sound; the pitiless pursuit. Did not love him!

Aluin's voice came again, — a deep note of joy:

"My love, Marie, it is for you."

Marie started and strained back against his arm. The twilight winds had fallen, but out of the west there came a ripple that touched her dry lips like cold water; and out of the dimness that bent above them Marie seemed to see a girl's face, pitiful, tender, bending down to her; and out of the stillness she heard again the warm whisper, "You can drink it all — dere 's plenty."

"Félicie," she whispered back.

"Bébé?" Aluin questioned, leaning to hear.

Marie's head went up in the air again.

"'T is not for you to call me Bébé," she cried clearly. "I will not wear ring wit' you. Non. 'T is only two days das Valère put hand on my hair." The memory of that uncouth caress broke

her nerve. Marie's voice went from her in a cry:

"Oh, I did not know what he wish to do. He ask me somet'ing. I did not know what 't is he ask me. I tell him 'oui' and he put his —"

"Marie," said Aluin firmly, "you are tired. For why you fight me so hard? I wish you quit das, Bébé. Your love is for me, and my love, all I have, all I ever going have, is for you. Now kiss me, cherie, and say 'oui' to me."

But Marie would not. Though the bent old man be behind her and only fear before, she could yet be loyal to the glad-eyed girl who had been good to her. She leaned away from Aluin and answered steadily.

"Your love is not for me," she said.

"Den for who 't is, Bébé?" Aluin asked patiently.

Marie told him without flinching.

"'T is for Félicie," she said.

"Félicie!" Aluin uttered. "Félicie! Mais, non!" Then he drew the resisting little figure close to him, took the quivering face in his strong hand and laid it safely against his breast.

"Bébé," he said gravely, "'t is not for girl to say for who a man's love is. 'T is not for man to say das. 'T is for God to say. And 't is mos' two mont' le bon Dieu have tell me, all time, my love must be for His little Marie. It make me proud when he tell me like das, Bébé." Aluin's cheek went down to the softly curling hair, his voice became but a murmur among the many murmurs of that southern night:

"Ce soir you run away from me, le bon Dieu tell me my love it is for you."

"Aluin!" The stars stooped lower; the wind grew still. "Aluin, ce soir! — *He tell me too.*"